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VOL. IV No. 6

MARCH 1951

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JONATHAN CAPE

## SIMONE WEIL

G. L. ARNOLD

IN his preface to a volume of essays by contributors representative of the Christian-existentialist school in post-war France,<sup>1</sup> M. Etienne Gilson refers to Gabriel Marcel as a descendant of 'cette lignée de penseurs français dont la spéculation philosophique n'a d'autre source que leur expérience intérieure et ne dure qu'en s'y référant continuellement'. With even greater justice might this description be applied to a writer whose posthumously published essays, note-books and letters have since 1948 caused a stir among French intellectuals, especially of the younger generation, comparable in some ways to the delayed impact of Kierkegaard upon many among Germany's student youth after 1918. If the short life and the fragmentary work of Simone Weil bear the stamp of uniqueness the reason lies not so much in the originality of her mind as in the consistency with which she fused experience, thought and action into one single indivisible whole.

It is in a sense misleading to call her a writer. In her own lifetime she published almost nothing, and the four volumes bearing her name which have appeared since 1948 were edited by friends from manuscripts, some of which are no more than rough drafts; two entire volumes have been filled with excerpts from her note-books, many of them mere jottings. Simone Weil was neither a prolific nor a systematic writer. The lengthy programmatic essay entitled *L'Enracinement*, which was completed shortly before her death in 1943, stands by itself as her only sustained and comprehensive effort towards systematic statement. Dealing with a wealth of subjects ranging from religion to politics, it constitutes one of the few genuinely impressive attempts yet made to put the philosophy of 'Christian democracy' into writing. Some fairly lengthy fragments of what might have become an equally important essay on morals were among the manuscripts deposited with a Dominican priest, Père Perrin, when Simone Weil left France for America in 1942, and these together with a number of letters have been published under the title *Attente de Dieu*. For the rest there are her note-books, or rather the selection edited by M. Gustave Thibon, himself a writer of some distinction, with a good deal of help from others, including M. Gabriel Marcel. Fragmentary as they are, these writings nonetheless form a whole and represent a distinctive point of view, of which the least that can be said is that nothing remotely like it has made its appearance elsewhere. Many of the subjects

<sup>1</sup> *Existentialisme Chrétien: Gabriel Marcel*.

touched upon in the note-books are indeed common to the whole group of writers to whom the more or less ill-fitting existentialist label has been attached. Equally it is arguable that the criticism of society put forward in *L'Enracinement* is so plainly in the Proudhonist tradition as to place Simone Weil within a recognizable stream of French thought. The ascription of originality to her work must not, therefore, be misunderstood to suggest that it occupies a kind of vacuum. What it does imply is that Simone Weil is not simply to be classed with any group of contemporary writers, however much she may have been influenced at various times by the rationalism of Alain, the socialism of Proudhon and Marx, or the theology and sociology of the Catholic Church. She is original even in her politics, for as will be seen she repudiates both the Ancien Régime and the Revolution, thus giving offence to conservatives and radicals alike. She is also a trenchant critic of the Church and a moralist on a high plane of speculative thinking — but of this less will be said, for I propose to deal only with those aspects of her thought which have a direct bearing upon contemporary problems. Almost everything she has written, however, is worth reading, and although translations will probably begin to appear before long, the extremely personal character of her work, and the peculiar note struck by her style, make it doubly advisable to consult the originals.<sup>1</sup>

## 2

The life of Simone Weil exemplifies the importance of a principle sometimes neglected by the less intelligent camp-followers of modern psychology, namely the importance of differentiating between the purely private and the meta-personal aspects of struggle and disharmony in the history of an individual. There is a good deal in the available accounts of her life that suggests a remarkably close intertwining of the neurotic and the genuinely spiritual. The distinction is of course orthodox from the psychoanalytical viewpoint as well as from any other, but how many psychologists are capable of making it in practice? In the case of Simone Weil there is also this to be considered: what we know of her comes mainly from Perrin and Thibon, both orthodox Catholics who nonetheless came to regard her as the bearer of an authentic message, a genuine mystic, and

<sup>1</sup> The following have been published: *La Pesanteur et la Grâce*. Introduction by Gustave Thibon. Plon, 1948; *L'Enracinement: Prélude à une Déclaration des Devoirs envers L'Être Humain*. Gallimard, 1949; *Attente de Dieu*. Introduction by Père Perrin, O.P. La Colombe, 1950; *La Connaissance Surnaturelle*. Gallimard, 1950. Previously, the New York review *Politics* had published translations of the following essays; *Reflections on War*, February 1945; *The Iliad or the Poem of Force*, November 1945; *Words and War*, March 1946; *Factory Work*, December 1946. Two essays thus far not translated into English (*L'Agonie d'une Civilisation* and *L'Inspiration Occitanienne*, both in *Cahiers du Sud*, August 1942) furnish a useful introduction to the study of her major writings.



something very near a saint. Simone Weil was born of Jewish parents, went through the usual course of rationalist and anti-clerical education, became a socialist, joined the revolutionary side in Spain, refused even after her conversion to Christianity to enter the Catholic Church, and maintained to the end a highly unorthodox mystical theology of her own. Yet her literary remains have been published by the Dominican Perrin and the Catholic conservative Thibon, in each case with prefatory remarks disclosing not merely personal admiration but a profound sense of spiritual kinship. Alain, her first teacher and perhaps, despite all, the most lasting intellectual influence in her life, 'garda profondément le souvenir de cette étonnante intelligence et il ne voulait pas croire qu'elle fût morte. "C'en'est pas vrai, répétait-il, n'est-ce-pas qu'elle reviendra?"' (Perrin, op cit., p. 19.) Lastly, we know that her parents remained intensely loyal to her, and she to them, although she had repudiated the spiritual heritage of Judaism along with traditional upbringing, bourgeois conventions, and all the prevailing orthodoxies of her day, social, political and religious. Something about her personality must have suggested to all who came in contact with her that she was not to be measured by ordinary standards.

There is, however, a difficulty to be overcome. The importance of psychological stresses in furthering or retarding her spiritual growth cannot be overlooked. From the accounts of her childhood it is evident that at an early age she began to manifest an unusual capacity for identifying herself with the sufferings of others. It is equally evident that the form this tendency took in her was not the common one of self-pity but the exceptional one of self-mortification, mounting to self-sacrifice. The psychologists must be left to deal as best they can with this aspect of the matter. The biographical facts can at any rate be stated with fair accuracy, since Perrin has told us a good deal about them, chiefly on the strength of what he learned from her parents. She was five years old in 1914 when the sight of wounded soldiers made her refuse to touch sugar and insist that it should be given away. At about the same time she took to going barefoot, from sympathy with some pauper children — but also, Perrin notes, to tease her parents. Later we find her described as shy, precociously intelligent — and lonely. Nothing very remarkable appears to have occurred at the *lycée*, where she came under the influence first of Le Senne and then of Alain, or during the three years (1928-31) she spent at the *École Normale*, save that her class-mates seem to have been less fond of her than her teachers.<sup>1</sup> But from the

<sup>1</sup> The evidence for this has not been published. It reduces itself to a vague characterization of Simone (and her more intimate friends), as 'arrogant', presumably because she did not join in the usual social activities. A more important piece of unpublished evidence concerning her later life will be considered presently.

moment when she took up teaching at Le Puy in 1931, the pattern of her life began to declare itself. She was then twenty-two, rather unprepossessing in appearance, ironically indifferent towards her official superiors and persons in authority generally, and very much a representative of the left-wing intelligentsia in her views and general bearing — save in one important particular: she tended to translate her opinions into immediate personal practice. Thus when it was laid down that the unemployed at Le Puy must break stones to qualify for financial relief, she not only took part in a protest demonstration but actually joined in the manual work thought suitable only for navvies. She also reverted to her childhood practice of rationing herself to essentials and turned over the balance of her income to those who needed it more urgently. After three years of this, her colleagues and superiors must have felt some relief when in 1934 they saw her depart for Paris, — to work in the Renault factory as a machine-tender, on the principle apparently that socialist intellectuals ought to know what they are talking about. She cannot have been altogether comfortable to live with.

Up to this point the story might still be regarded as not untypical of her generation. In Paris, however, she suffered a breakdown which became important for her subsequent development: she could not endure life at Renault and found herself compelled to terminate the experiment after less than a year. Extracts from the journal she kept at that time have appeared under the title *Journal d'Usine*. They contain much that is orthodox socialist criticism of the inhumanity of factory life, but they also reveal a degree of nervous sensitivity to the sheer physical strain of mechanical work which would in any case have made longer continuance impossible for her. She had always suffered from violent headaches which at times incapacitated her, and her death from tuberculosis at the age of thirty-four suggests that a metal factory was at no time a suitable environment. But over and above these physical factors a sense of horror at the conditions of industrial life seems to have been implanted in her by the experience she underwent at Renault. It deepened her awareness of social reality and enabled her to fill a whole chapter of *L'Enracinement* with detailed suggestions for improving not merely the conditions of work but the methods of technical and vocational training in modern industry. But it also seems to have produced something like a nervous breakdown and a profound depression of spirit. At any rate when Perrin made her acquaintance in 1941 she told him that the experience had marked her for life. 'J'ai reçu là pour toujours la marque de l'esclavage, comme la marque au fer rouge que les Romains mettaient au front de leurs esclaves les plus méprisées. Depuis, je me suis toujours regardée comme une esclave.' (Op. cit., p. 20.) It is plain from what she told

Perrin, and from her remarks on the general subject of industrialism in *L'Enracinement*, that the mental anguish she suffered was in some sense a reflection of what she felt to be the miserable and 'uprooted' condition of her work-mates, but the fact that she broke down suggests that a personal element entered into the matter. This is even more obvious of her next experience: when the civil war began in Spain in 1936 she promptly put her philosophy into practice by joining up in a non-combatant capacity; but an accident which no psychologist would allow to pass without comment — she somehow managed to spill boiling oil over her feet — soon caused her to be invalided out. It is probably not without significance that about the same time her political views underwent a change. At any rate she returned from Spain thoroughly disillusioned, and her criticism of society from that time onwards assumed a conservative and traditionalist colouring, without ceasing to be socialist in character. She was on the way towards the mature view formulated in *L'Enracinement*.

It was then that she started on the last and decisive phase of her spiritual journey. At Easter 1937 she was at Solesmes, listening to the Gregorian chant and feeling increasingly drawn to the Catholic Church, yet not joining it. About this time she made the acquaintance of a young English Catholic through whom she became aware of the Metaphysical poets, particularly Herbert. When she met Perrin four years later she laid stress on this chance encounter and on the time spent at Solesmes in helping to bring about her conversion. Then or later she went through the mystical experience which is alluded to in her notes and in a letter to Perrin (op. cit., p. 21). From this time onwards she regarded herself as a Christian, but did not join the Church and maintained her reservations on certain aspects of Catholic doctrine, as well as her unreserved condemnation of historical Christianity as manifested in the life of the Church, against all the arguments brought forward by her Catholic friends. Her final refusal to undergo baptism seems, however, to have been motivated by a personal reason which is the subject of one of her last letters to Perrin before leaving France in May 1942. Here she lays stress upon an inner sense of reluctance to hasten a process which must be consummated in its own good time — an argument he naturally could not altogether accept, since it savoured of spiritual arrogance and private judgment. On the subject of her attitude towards the Church it is perhaps best to let Perrin speak: 'Elle ne dit pas aimer l'Église, mais en même temps elle était prête à mourir pour elle, tant elle en comprenait l'importance; elle se sentait dans une situation inextricable, mentant en restant hors de cette Église et mentant en frappant à sa porte sans avoir résolu les difficultés qui encombraient sa route.'

What the 'difficulties' were will appear in due course. Here it must be sufficient to remark that Perrin has published in full the writings placed in his keeping when she left Marseilles for America, notwithstanding the painful hesitations he had to overcome. His introduction is an extremely interesting and in its way a moving document. It bears witness to the powerful impression Simone Weil had made upon him, although he remarks not unfairly that in some respects her mind had not completely matured. She was notably prone to extreme judgments in instances where her animosity had been aroused, e.g. in everything that concerned Roman history and what she regarded as the enduring influence of Rome upon Europe and the Catholic Church. Similarly he found himself at times placed in the paradoxical position of having to defend the Jewish heritage against her impassioned strictures.

We have another account of her during this period, when she was staying in southern France as a refugee, the Weil family having left Paris in 1941 to escape from the Germans. This is contained in G. Thibon's preface to the volume edited by him (*La Pesanteur et la Grâce*) from manuscripts, mainly in note form, dealing with religious subjects. The first encounter between these two kindred spirits was anything but promising. She had been recommended to him by Perrin, who had then only met her once or twice, as 'une jeune fille israélite, agrégée de philosophie et militante d'extrême gauche, qui, exclue de l'Université par les nouvelles lois, désirerait travailler quelque temps à la campagne' — a somewhat misleading description which did not predispose Thibon in her favour. An orthodox Catholic, a conservative, a farmer and a self-taught man of letters who had already published writings critical of the whole trend of modern culture, he felt some qualms at the thought of making her welcome. What followed is best described in his own language:

Nos premiers contacts furent cordiaux, mais pénibles. Sur le plan concret, nous n'étions d'accord à peu près sur rien. Elle discutait à l'infini, d'une voix inflexible et monotone, et je sortais littéralement usé de ces entretiens sans issue. Je m'armai alors, pour la supporter, de patience et de courtoisie. Et puis, grâce au privilège de la vie commune, je constatai peu à peu que ce côté impossible de son caractère, loin d'être l'expression de sa nature profonde, ne traduisait guère que son moi extérieur et social... contrairement à la plupart des hommes, elle gagnait infiniment à être connue dans une atmosphère d'intimité; elle extériorisait, avec une spontanéité redoutable, le côté déplaisant de sa nature, mais il lui fallait beaucoup de temps, d'affection et de pudeur vaincue pour manifester ce qu'elle avait de meilleur... je n'ai jamais rencontré, dans un être humain, une telle familiarité avec les mystères religieux; jamais le mot de *surnaturel* ne m'est apparu plus gonflé de réalité qu'à son contact.

It was typical of her that after staying with Thibon for a while she suddenly decided that she was too comfortable and moved to a semi-derelict annexe. She naturally insisted upon doing all the most

back-breaking kinds of farm work, gave up half her rations to political prisoners in town, and systematically drove herself to the point of exhaustion. Yet she found time and energy to spend hours every day after work helping Thibon with his Greek (they read Plato together and he found her an excellent teacher). For the rest he was pleasantly surprised to discover that when the mask had fallen she was good company, gay and animated, and not in the least put out by her new surroundings. When she returned to Marseilles in the autumn to resume her endless discussions with Perrin, he seems to have felt the loss severely, and the parting letter she wrote him from Oran in May 1942 contains a passage which indicates that he had proposed marriage. She continued to write until the occupation of southern France by the Germans in November 1942 put an end to the correspondence. In 1944, still hoping to see her again, he received the news that she had died of tuberculosis in a hospital in Kent the year before.

It must be borne in mind that when Perrin and Thibon came into contact with her in 1941, Simone Weil was only two years from her end. Her view of life had settled during the four preceding years, concerning which we are left somewhat in the dark by her biographers, but the most important of her writings were composed during the final phase. After Perrin had moved to Montpellier in March 1942 they met less frequently, and from the time when she sailed with her parents for the United States two months later, we are left without a satisfactory substitute biographer. Her spiritual record can in part be deciphered from the note-books published under the title *La Connaissance Surnaturelle*, which date from this period but are largely composed of disconnected fragments. *L'Enracinement*, part of which was written in London where she arrived on November 10th, 1942, will presently be considered in some detail. It is, in the opinion of the present writer, one of the more important contributions to the post-war discussion in France, but from the biographical viewpoint it has less significance than her religious writings, with which I do not propose to deal.

Of her life in London during these final months little is known, save that she worked in the Gaullist organization, applied unsuccessfully for permission to be parachuted into occupied France, and spent much time with a small group of personal friends. Her health, which had always been bad, soon gave rise to anxiety, not least because she insisted on reducing her diet to the starvation level then reigning in France. Tuberculosis set in, which she did little to check. There is plainly an element of self-destruction, whether conscious or unconscious, in the circumstances surrounding her death. Did she believe, as has been suggested, that when a certain stage of mystical illumination has been attained the coming of death ought not to be



resisted? Her friends at any rate were in no doubt that the régime of self-mortification which she imposed upon herself was a factor in hastening the end. On August 24th, 1943, she died at Ashford hospital in Kent.<sup>1</sup>

## 3

A candid attempt to assess the significance of Simone Weil's thought must start from the admission that her work is too fragmentary to bear the weight of specialist criticism. It belongs to the class of utterances which draw their effect from the production of a kind of shock upon the reader. This is true even of *L'Enracinement*, her most considerable piece of work and the only one that approaches systematic form. Although largely concerned with the causes of the French collapse in 1940, it is an essay on morals — even on metaphysics — as much as an attempt at analysis. Historical and psychological insights, often of astonishing force and brilliance, are scattered throughout its 250 pages, but the emphasis is upon the moral choice before the individual rather than upon the functioning of society. Simone Weil is a moralist in the classic French tradition, the last of a great line which begins at the opening of the modern era and has ever since produced an unbroken succession of writers concerned with the whole duty of man towards eternity and his fellow-beings. Her tone, moreover, is almost as polemical as that of Péguy (whom she resembles in more than one respect), and her emphasis, where she deals with public matters, is commonly upon the moral and intellectual degradation of the élite which led France to destruction in 1940. It will scarcely be supposed that the literary product of this relentless quest for the sources of material disaster and spiritual corruption is of the kind which is commonly preferred in this country — a careful weighing of arguments and a tolerant attempt to be fair to all concerned. It must also be conceded to the critics, who have already made their voices heard, that there are occasions when she comes close to absurdity, e.g. in proposing that newspapers (as distinct from periodicals) should be forbidden to put forward any kind of editorial opinion, lest the reading public continue to be benumbed by paid propagandists; or in suggesting that special tribunals should watch over the factual truth of everything asserted in print. It may or may not be desirable that some means should be found to bring gross errors to the notice of the public. But when the argument is

<sup>1</sup> 'Elle est morte Cathare', one who knew her is reported to have said of her last phase. Since this statement has never before appeared in print, it may be as well to append a reservation. Those who believe, or perhaps only repeat the rumour, that she held 'Manichean' views, and was in touch with others of like mind, have yet to offer evidence. It is, however, incontestable that her writings are shot through with sympathetic references to the Albigensians (Cf. *L'Enracinement*, pp. 95 et seq.).

pushed to the point of suggesting that anyone should have the right to arraign e.g. M. Maritain for having overlooked the existence of those Greek thinkers who, unlike Aristotle, condemned the institution of slavery — it becomes plain that what is proposed is not merely objectionable but impossible. Or to take another instance, the suggestion that political parties in their present form should not be tolerated is frankly utopian and fundamentally undemocratic as well, even when backed by the unimpeachable argument that all modern mass organizations are potentially totalitarian. The tendency of these and similar arguments, scattered throughout the first part of *L'Enracinement*, is towards a sort of idealized 'Christian corporatism', of which it is sufficient to say that whatever the intentions of its more democratic proponents, its practical application so far has resulted either in the grotesqueries of the Dollfuss-Schuschnigg régime, or in frankly provisional and makeshift institutions such as those of Portugal under Salazar. Neither, incidentally, is mentioned by Simone Weil and the whole direction of her thought is towards something far more closely in tune with the historic traditions of French socialism, notably as represented by Proudhon and the 'Fédérés' of 1871. It is, however, not without significance that although passionately attached to the cause of Free France she seems to have contemplated the disappearance of the Third Republic with a good deal of equanimity. Vichy, she thought, was merely profiting from the hopeless corruption of the Republican régime, an opinion undoubtedly shared by many radicals at the time but which led them to underestimate the fundamental attachment of the French people to the self-governing institutions, however eaten-away and discredited, of which in 1940 they suddenly found themselves deprived. In her conviction that the pre-war régime must on no account be permitted to re-establish itself after Vichy's sham-corporate experiments had been swept away, she doubtless reflected the prevailing mood of the resistance movement, or at any rate of its intellectuals. *L'Enracinement* is very much a document of this period of soul-searching, out of which have come so many things, some hopeful, others sterile, which have helped to make the Fourth Republic different from its predecessor. But it is only on the left wing of the M.R.P., among the more radical representatives of 'Christian democracy' and 'Christian socialism', that her pronouncements are likely to find a ready echo. And these friendly critics will inevitably be the first to note that the all-important question of forging a political instrument for carrying out the proposed institutional changes is hardly considered at all. Simone Weil is indeed weakest on the point on which the practitioners of politics are strongest: she obstinately refuses to face the problem of power. She takes it for granted that some authority or other exists and can be relied upon



to decree fundamental changes for which majority consent may not be available. The confusion is not improved by demanding that the central government should abdicate its functions as far as possible in favour of local, regional and professional associations. For, since the workers' movement is explicitly described as unable to effect the necessary changes, the political parties are to be dissolved, and the State itself is to surrender the excessive power it has acquired, no adequate authority is left. We are, it seems, back with the utopians, and it is impossible not to remember that Proudhon, who anticipated much of Simone Weil's political and social programme, left his followers face to face with problems they had never thought of solving, and thus helped to bring on the colossal disaster of the Commune. Even Marx's subsequent declaration that the programme of the Communards, if given a chance, would have regenerated French society and introduced genuine self-government in the place of centralized bureaucracy, cannot alter the fact that the catastrophe was chiefly due to the inability of the 'Fédérés' to make use of such authority as they possessed.

*L'Enracinement* is, however, more than a sketch of a Christian-socialist utopia, with industry decentralized, factories transformed into model institutions, village life ennobled, prostitution abolished, and education directed towards non-utilitarian ends. It contains all this and a good deal besides, e.g. a brilliant thumb-nail sketch of French history and a passionate onslaught on the nationalism of Maurras. But its primary significance is moral. If it fails as a statement of aims, it succeeds as an indictment of the *status quo* and of the intellectuals among its defenders. The indictment, moreover, is delivered not in abstract terms but in the form of a challenge to established values. It is, after all, a fact that France broke down in 1940, and to say that the disaster occurred because 'patriotism is not enough' and Frenchmen had nothing else to fall back upon, is to question some very deep-rooted national traditions. Again, a writer of the resistance movement who does not hesitate to assert that France was the aggressor in 1870, that the defeat of 1940 was deserved, and that the cult of Jeanne d'Arc between the wars was a species of nationalist idolatry designed to take the place of the forgotten Christian religion — is not an everyday phenomenon. Nor is it customary for French writers to denounce the imposition of French culture upon Provençals, Bretons, Flemings, Arabs, Negroes and Malays as spiritual murder. If Simone Weil had written nothing but the pages in *L'Enracinement* which describe the extension of French sovereignty to the provinces south of the Loire a slight tremor must have been caused in the realm of French letters on this account alone. The following passage, far from being unusual, is typical of her style of writing:

... on peut trouver dans l'histoire des faits d'une atrocité aussi grande, mais non plus grande, sauf peut-être quelques rares exceptions, que la conquête par les Français des territoires situés au sud de la Loire, au début du XIII<sup>e</sup> siècle. Ces territoires où existait un niveau de vie élevé de culture, de tolérance, de liberté, de vie spirituelle, étaient animés d'un patriotisme intense pour ce qu'ils nommaient leur 'language'; mot par lequel ils désignaient la patrie. Les Français étaient pour eux des étrangers et des barbares, comme pour nous les Allemands. [Written in 1943, G. L. A.] Pour imprimer immédiatement la terreur, les Français commencèrent par exterminer la ville entière de Béziers, et ils obtinrent l'effet cherché. Une fois le pays conquis, ils y installèrent l'Inquisition. Un trouble sourd continua à couvrir parmi ces populations, et les poussa plus tard à embrasser avec ardeur le Protestantisme, dont d'Aubigny dit, malgré les différences si considérables de doctrine, qu'il procède directement des Albigeois. On peut voir combien était forte dans ces pays la haine du pouvoir central, par la ferveur religieuse témoignée à Toulouse aux restes du Duc de Montmorency, décapité pour rébellion contre Richelieu. La même protestation latente les jeta avec enthousiasme dans la Révolution française. Plus tard ils devinrent radicaux-socialistes, laïques, anticléricaux; sous la III<sup>e</sup> République ils ne haïssaient plus le pouvoir central; ils s'en étaient dans une large mesure emparés et l'exploitaient.

On peut remarquer qu'à chaque fois leur protestation a pris un caractère de déracinement plus intense et un niveau de spiritualité et de pensée plus bas. On peut remarquer aussi que depuis qu'ils ont été conquis, ces pays ont apporté à la culture française une contribution assez faible, alors qu'auparavant ils étaient tellement brillants. La pensée française doit d'avantage aux Albigeois et au troubadours du XII<sup>e</sup> siècle, qui n'étaient pas français, qu'à tout ce que ces territoires ont produit au cours des siècles suivants (pp. 95-6).

Remarks such as these help to explain why both the Right and the Left have found it difficult to discover a suitable label for Simone Weil. She has a disconcerting habit of cutting across familiar lines of approach, as when she enlivens an exposition of the socialist faith by rounding upon the Marxists, or as in the above passage where the indictment of the Monarchy and the Church reaches a climax in the casual tossing of a hand-grenade at the Republicans and the anti-clericals. In this, as well as in her social and moral judgments, she comes closest to Péguy, to whom she has inevitably been compared. But Péguy was orthodox in religion and a nationalist, though of the anti-Maurassien stripe, in politics. Worst of all from Simone Weil's point of view, he thought highly of the institutions and traditions of classical Rome, for which she entertained an aversion equalled only by her dislike of the Old Testament. It is thus extremely difficult to 'place' her — and that is just why her writings have had such an impact upon young people impatient of the stale dispute between clericals and anti-clericals which has now been going on for more than a century, and eager likewise to break away from the traditional political feuds. There is a puritanical rigour about her judgments which sets her apart from other post-war writers. After pondering her impassioned indictment of the Ancien Régime, of Richelieu and Bossuet and Louis XIV, and then coming upon her half contemptu-

ous, half pitying attitude towards the Enlightenment and the Revolution, one begins to wonder what French intellectual life would have been like if the Reformation had not been aborted. To be an unorthodox Christian in a country neatly split between Catholics and anti-clericals, a Proudhonist socialist in a century of mass organization, a moralist contemptuous of Latinity, and a mystic more attached to Plato and the Upanishads than to the Bible, requires at the very least an unusual capacity for going one's own way. Dr. Inge, one fancies, would approve of her metaphysics. One cannot imagine any French theologian doing so, just as one cannot see any organized body of opinion taking up what might be called her 'programme', though some Catholics are probably in sympathy with it.

## 4

If the foregoing remarks have made it appear that *L'Enracinement* is primarily a tract for the times, that impression must now be corrected. A considerable part of it, and nearly everything else that Simone Weil set down in writing, belongs either to the realm of moral theology — if so antiquated a term can be used to describe the kind of utterance that expresses the existentialist consciousness — or alternatively to that of religious introspection. For the theologian, the mystic, the psychologist and the student of the varieties of religious experience, her writings offer a fascinating field of study. Their attention will probably be caught in the first place by the reflections set down in the group of manuscripts published under the title *Attente de Dieu*, and by the letters to Perrin (also included in this volume) which define her attitude towards the Catholic Church. They are likely, even if they cannot accept her positive beliefs, to be struck by the uncommon beauty and penetration of essays such as the one entitled *Réflexions sur le bon usage des études scolaires en vue de l'amour de Dieu*. And they may find much to interest them in her other writings, although Alain has professed some disappointment with *La Pesanteur et la Grâce*, the selection made by Thibon. But for the purpose of this article her metaphysics can be considered only in so far as they bear directly upon her doctrine of personal and collective responsibility. *L'Enracinement* is significant just because it does attempt to link personal morality and public affairs. The attempt is made within the framework of Christian metaphysics, and the Christianity is not that of any existing church, while the metaphysics are borrowed from Plato and the Neo-Platonists. But in the present context this is immaterial. It now remains to inquire wherein consists the link between what Simone Weil held to be true of the world, and what she regarded as desirable and possible of fulfilment in the life of the individual and society. It should then be possible

to indicate whether her thinking forms part of a continuing tradition — as in accordance with her own principles it should: for Simone Weil is very much of a traditionalist and in her writings outdoes Burke in her attachment to the past and her insistence upon the importance of the partnership between the living and the dead. Society itself is declared to draw its *raison d'être* from the fact that it functions as 'l'unique organe de transmission par l'intermédiaire duquel les morts puissent parler au vivants'. Where in this continuing chain can one place the work of Simone Weil?<sup>1</sup>

The intellectual life of France since the war is often misleadingly described in terms of a three-cornered dispute, with the small group of existentialist writers attempting to hold a position midway between the Christian and Communist camps. Existentialism is thus pictured as a fad specially invented for the benefit of unattached intellectuals. This legend has had support from Catholics and Communists alike, since both are anxious to claim for themselves a monopoly of everything not indubitably belonging to the enemy. In actual fact there has been little if any crossing of swords between orthodox Catholics and orthodox Communists, if only because Rome and Moscow do not favour such encounters. Leninism is in any case not a doctrine which can be expounded to educated West Europeans without raising a laugh. Marx's writings, on the other hand, contain much that critics of society cannot find elsewhere. Hence it is not surprising that argument has raged in the main between unorthodox Marxists on the one hand and unorthodox Christians on the other, while the Communist and Catholic organizations have contributed little beyond stereotyped apologetics of no great interest or novelty. The battle, in short, is between the Christian existentialists and those who derive from Marx. The 'atheist humanism' of J. P. Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir is plainly Marxism with an admixture of Kierkegaard, just as the Christian existentialism of Gabriel Marcel and Emmanuel Mounier is Kierkegaard with a

<sup>1</sup> Since no attempt is made in the following to comment critically upon her metaphysics, it may be as well to draw attention to an article by Mr. L. Fiedler, in the American-Jewish review *Commentary* (January 1951), which contains *inter alia* a sort of riposte to Simone Weil's assault upon traditional Judaism. That Jewish mystical theology was a closed book to her does not indeed require much evidence. Her relationship to traditional Christianity is perhaps sufficiently indicated by the fact that she regarded the Ilias, rather than the Old Testament, as its spiritual source. In her eyes, the Catholic Church — aside from being a mass-organization and tainted with all the imperfections of one — suffered quite simply from being altogether too 'Jewish'. Her theology, in short, is of the Gnostic variety and forms a complete counterpart to her personal asceticism and her cult of *Innerlichkeit*, to use the untranslatable German expression. It is at the farthest possible remove from traditional Judaism, but also, it must be supposed, from any conceivable Christian 'theology of the Bible', in the spirit of modern Neo-Protestantism.

dash of Marx. The same is true of their followers. To show this in detail would be tedious. It is plain from all their writings, and whoever doubts it has only to read *Les Temps Modernes*, *Esprit*, *La Table Ronde*, and the other periodicals in which the debate is carried on. This is not to deny that some of those on the Christian side are Catholics; the point is that the arguments with which they meet their humanist opponents are designed to show that Christian truths can be presented in existentialist terms. When Simone Weil denounces Pascal's apologetics as dishonest because 'il a entrepris une recherche intellectuelle en décidant à l'avance où elle devait le mener' (*L'Enracinement*, p. 212), or when she pours contempt upon Bergson's pragmatic arguments in defence of religion (p. 213), she is, whether she knows it or not, echoing Kierkegaard's strictures upon the theologians of his time. There are, as we have seen, other elements in her thought, but it is evident that on this point at any rate she does stand within a tradition.

It is perhaps needless to add that the current alignment itself reflects the fact that Marx and Kierkegaard reacted against Hegel at about the same time and in similar ways, though for different reasons and with different results, and that their respective revolts were directed against related aspects of the culture of their time; so that it is not really surprising to find the contemporary debate largely dominated by their followers, notably in France and Germany where bourgeois society and bourgeois Christianity have both been more severely shaken than elsewhere, and where for various reasons there has always been a greater readiness to discuss current problems in terms of fundamentals. But the point to be made about Simone Weil is that she does exhibit a novel and possibly significant trait. Hitherto no real encounter between the two sides — to say nothing of the orthodox from whom they have both split off — has been possible, because there has been no common ground between the disciples of Marx, with their hopes placed upon the regeneration of society, and the followers of the Danish theologian, with their insistence upon the supreme importance of the individual. Now Simone Weil, despite the immaturity of much of her thought and the fragmentary character of her work, does represent a step in the direction of establishing common ground. Her rejection of the Communist apocalyptic places her firmly on the Christian side of the dispute, but there is less in her of that insistence upon the regeneration of the individual as the first step to a regenerated society which renders almost all theological writing on the subject so unutterably boring to the humanist.

It will have become plain that to class Simone Weil is not a simple matter. An attempt will probably be made, notwithstanding her



unorthodoxies, to claim her for the Catholic Church.<sup>1</sup> This seems unlikely to succeed, though the *Jeunesses Ouvrières Catholiques* in France may take her up, unless dissuaded by their elders. The Socialists, being committed to anti-clericalism and no longer much interested in the 'federalism' of Proudhon, can do nothing with her. At a different level she may serve as a catalyst of opinions cutting across traditional lines of thought. In the end she is likely to become, like Péguy, one of those lonely figures belonging to no party, yet claimed by all. Only the Stalinists and the Fascists appear self-excluded from this kind of contest.

There is another sense in which she occupies a curiously isolated position. French thinking has in modern times grown increasingly wary of the unhistorical cast of mind so often demonstrated by its representatives in the past — the quality castigated as 'utopianism' by Marx, and denounced before his time by conservative critics of the Revolution. The *philosophes* were notably utopian in their belief that the right order of society could be established by an act of will, and the early socialists — down to and in part including Proudhon — inherited this conviction. Utopianism rests upon idealism, since it implies that the right relationship between human beings in society already exists as a pattern laid up in heaven. For the utopian, all that is needed to bring it down to earth is the right kind of insight, allied to the will. The Revolution was just such an attempt; so, under different circumstances, was the Commune of 1871 which showed that the revolutionary dream was still alive among the workers. It was only after its failure that they were converted to Marxism which located the fulfilment of the dream at the end of the historical rainbow — or, in more elevated language, put prophetic eschatology in the place of utopian idealism. The contrast must not be pushed too far. In the last resort, Utopia and the classless society turn out to be remarkably alike — not surprisingly, since both derive from the historical *Polis*, as seen in the transfiguring light of Jewish-Christian eschatology with its un-Hellenic emphasis upon equality between men and women, free men and slaves, etc. Yet there remains a difference in emphasis. Modern thinking, whether conservative or revolutionary, tends to be historical and to place its hopes within the context of a pattern unfolding in time according to a rhythm of its own. On the whole, French thought since the Revolution has increasingly conformed to this tendency. It would be misleading to suggest that Simone Weil represents a complete exception or that the utopian strain in her thinking has altogether ousted the eschatological. But it is not without significance that, living in an epoch which had all

<sup>1</sup> Perhaps it has already begun. See *Blackfriars*, August 1950. No doubt the Dominicans will try harder than the Jesuits, for whom she can scarcely have had much liking.

but made a fetish of history, she seems to have deliberately righted the balance in favour of Utopia. *L'Enracinement* begins and ends with an invocation, not of historical fact but of immutable truth. For this reason alone its author is not likely to be soon forgotten or replaced in the consciousness of her compatriots.

#### APPENDIX

The following extracts have been selected more or less at random to illustrate the general character of the argument placed before the reader in *L'Enracinement* and to convey some notion of Simone Weil's cast of mind. They are not intended to do more than amplify what has been said of her personalist interpretation of history. Any study of her views upon the nature of belief and the moral consciousness must be based upon her other writings, principally those contained in *Attente de Dieu*. What follows is quoted from *L'Enracinement*, and in general the selection accords with the arrangement of subjects in that volume. I have thought it best not to attempt translation.

#### From *Les Besoins de l'Âme*

La notion d'obligation prime celle de droit, qui lui est subordonnée et relative. Un droit n'est pas efficace par lui-même, mais seulement par l'obligation à laquelle il correspond . . . Les droits apparaissent comme liés à certains conditions. L'obligation seule peut être inconditionnée. Elle se place dans un domaine qui est au-dessus de toutes conditions, parce qu'il est au-dessus de ce monde . . . L'objet de l'obligation, dans le domaine des choses humaines est toujours l'être humain comme tel . . . Cette obligation est éternelle. Elle répond à la destinée éternelle de l'être humain. Seul l'être humain a une destinée éternelle. Les collectivités humaines n'en ont pas.

Le fait qu'un être humain possède une destinée éternelle n'impose qu'une seule obligation; c'est le respect. L'obligation n'est accomplie que si le respect est effectivement exprimé, d'une manière réelle et non fictive: il ne peut l'être que par l'intermédiaire des besoins terrestres de l'homme. C'est donc une obligation éternelle envers l'être humain que de ne pas le laisser souffrir de la faim quand on a l'occasion de le secourir. . . .

Les obligations . . . dérivent toutes, sans exception, des besoins vitaux de l'être humain. Celles qui ne concernent pas directement tel, tel et tel être humain déterminé ont toutes pour objet des choses qui ont par rapport aux hommes un rôle analogue à la nourriture.

On doit le respect à un champ de blé, non pas pour lui-même, mais parce que c'est de la nourriture pour les hommes. D'une manière analogue, on doit du respect à une collectivité, quelle qu'elle soit — patrie, famille ou tout autre — non pas pour elle-même, mais comme nourriture d'un certain nombre d'âmes humaines . . . la collectivité a ses racines dans le passé. Elle constitue l'unique organe de conservation pour les trésors spirituels amassés par les morts, l'unique organe de transmission par l'intermédiaire duquel les morts puissent parler au vivants . . . Certaines collectivités, au lieu de servir de



nourriture, tout au contraire mangent les âmes. Il y a en ce cas maladie sociale ... Enfin il y a des collectivités mortes qui, sans dévorer les âmes, ne les nourrissent pas non plus. S'il est tout à fait certain qu'elles sont bien mortes, qu'il ne s'agit pas d'une léthargie passagère, et seulement en ce cas, il faut les anéantir (pp. 1-14).

(It will be seen how strong is the emphasis in these passages upon the archetypal significance of the human need for nourishment. After what has been said about Simone Weil's personal attitude, the fact need cause no surprise, but it obviously has its significance for her biography.)

... l'obsessions des salaires renforce l'influence communiste, parce que les questions d'argent, si vivement qu'elles touchent presque tous les hommes, dégagent en même temps pour tous les hommes un ennui si mortel que la perspective apocalyptique de la révolution, selon la version communiste, est indispensable pour compenser. Si les bourgeois n'ont pas le même besoin d'apocalypse, c'est que les chiffres élevés ont une poésie, un prestige qui tempère un peu l'ennui lié à l'argent, au lieu que quand l'argent se compte en sous, l'ennui est à l'état pur. D'ailleurs le goût des bourgeois grands et petits pour le fascisme montre que, malgré tout, eux aussi s'ennuient (pp. 32-3).

#### *From Le Déracinement*

Depuis plusieurs siècles les hommes de race blanche on détruit du passé partout, stupidement, aveuglement, chez eux et hors de chez eux. Si à certains égards il y a eu néanmoins progrès véritable au cours de cette période, ce n'est pas à cause de cette rage, mais malgré elle, sous l'impulsion du peu de passé demeuré vivant. Le passé détruit ne revient jamais plus. La destruction du passé est peut-être le plus grand crime. Aujourd'hui, la conservation du peu qui reste devrait devenir presque une idée fixe. Il faut arrêter le déracinement terrible que produisent toujours les méthodes coloniales des Européens, mêmes sous leurs formes les moins cruelles. Il faut s'abstenir, après la victoire, de punir l'ennemi vaincu en le déracinant encore d'avantage; dès lors qu'il n'est ni possible ni désirable de l'exterminer, aggraver sa folie serait être plus fou que lui. Il faut aussi avoir en vue avant tout, dans toute innovation politique, juridique ou technique susceptibles de répercussions sociales, un arrangement permettant au êtres de reprendre des racines. Cela ne signifie pas les confier. Jamais au contraire l'aération n'a été plus indispensable. L'enracinement et la multiplication des contacts sont complémentaires (p. 51).

Notre époque a pour sa mission propre, pour vocation, la constitution d'une civilisation fondée sur la spiritualité du travail. Les pensées qui se rapportent au pressentiment de cette vocation, et qui sont éparses chez Rousseau, George Sand, Tolstoi, Proudhon, Marx, dans les encyclopediques des papes, et ailleurs, sont les seules pensées originales de notre temps, les seules que nous n'ayons pas empruntées au Grecs. C'est parce que nous n'avons pas été à la hauteur de cette grande chose qui était en train d'être enfantée en nous que nous nous sommes jetés dans l'abîme des systèmes totalitaires (p. 89).

Le mouvement ouvrier français issu de la Révolution a été essentiellement un cri, moins de révolte que de protestation, devant la dureté impitoyable du sort à l'égard de tous les opprimés. Relativement à ce que l'on peut attendre d'un mouvement collectif, il y avait en celui-là beaucoup de pureté. Il a pris fin en 1914; depuis, il n'en est resté que des échos; les poisons de la société environnante ont corrompu même le sens du malheur.

La liste concrète des douleurs des ouvriers fournit celle des choses à modifier ... Il faut changer le régime de l'attention au cours des heures de travail, la

nature des stimulants qui poussent à vaincre la paresse ou l'épuisement — stimulants qui aujourd'hui ne sont que la peur et les sous — la nature de l'obéissance, la quantité trop faible d'initiative, d'habileté et de réflexion demandée aux ouvriers, l'impossibilité ou ils sont de prendre part par la pensée et le sentiment à l'ensemble du travail de l'entreprise. . . .

. . . l'essentiel est l'idée même de poser en termes techniques les problèmes concernant les répercussions des machines sur le bien-être des ouvriers. Une fois posés, les techniciens n'ont qu'à les résoudre. Ils en ont résolu bien d'autres. Il faut seulement qu'ils le veuillent . . . un pape a dit: 'La matière sort ennoblie de la fabrique, les travailleurs sortent avilis.' Marx a exprimé exactement la même pensée en termes encore plus vigoureux . . . Si, même au milieu de la démoralisation actuelle, les paysans ont bien moins besoin que les ouvriers d'être continuellement aiguillonnés par les stimulants, cela tient peut-être à cette différence. Un enfant peut être déjà malheureux aux champs à neuf ou dix ans, mais presque toujours il y a eu un moment où le travail était pour lui un jeu merveilleux, réservé aux grandes personnes. . . .

Rien ne montre mieux la carence essentielle de la classe capitaliste que la négligence des patrons à l'égard de l'apprentissage . . . Les patrons, depuis vingt ou trente ans, ont oublié de songer à la formation de bons professionnels. Le manque d'ouvriers qualifiés a contribué autant que tout autre facteur à la perte du pays . . . La carence des syndicats ouvriers à l'égard du problème de l'apprentissage est tout aussi scandaleuse d'un autre point de vue. Eux n'avaient pas à se préoccuper de l'avenir de la production; mais, ayant pour unique raison d'être la défense de la justice, ils auraient dû être touchés par la détresse morale des petits gars. En fait, la partie vraiment misérable de la population des usines, les adolescents, les femmes, les ouvriers immigrés, étrangers ou coloniaux, était abandonnée. La somme entière de leur douleur comptait beaucoup moins dans la vie syndicale que le problème d'une augmentation de salaire pour les catégories déjà largement payées (pp. 53-60). Le problème du déracinement paysan n'est pas moins grave que celui du déracinement ouvrier. Quoique la maladie soit moins avancée, elle a quelque chose d'encore plus scandaleux; car il est contre la nature que la terre soit cultivée par des êtres déracinés . . . Le déracinement paysan a été, au cours des dernières années, un danger aussi mortel pour le pays que le déracinement ouvrier. Un des symptômes les plus graves a été, il y a sept ou huit ans, le dépeuplement des campagnes se poursuivant en pleine crise de chômage . . . La caserne a été un terrible facteur de déracinement pour les jeunes paysans . . . Il n'y a aucune raison d'installer les casernes dans les villes. A l'usage des jeunes paysans, on pourrait très bien établir des casernes loin de toute ville. Il est vrai que les patrons des maisons de tolérance y perdraient. Mais il est inutile de songer à aucune espèce de réforme si l'on n'est pas absolument décidé à mettre fin à la collusion des pouvoirs publics avec ces gens-là, et à abolir une institution qui est une des hontes de la France. . . Si l'on pouvait supputer exactement les facteurs de notre désastre, on trouverait peut-être que toutes nos hontes — comme celle-là, et celle des appétits coloniaux, et celle des traitements infligés aux étrangers — ont eu leur contre-coup effectif pour notre perte. On peut dire beaucoup de choses de notre malheur, mais non qu'il soit immérité.

#### *The Nation-State*

La nation seule, depuis déjà longtemps, joue le rôle qui constitue par excellence la mission de collectivité à l'égard de l'être humain, à savoir assurer à travers le présent une liaison entre le passé et l'avenir. En ce sens on peut dire que c'est la seule collectivité qui existe dans l'univers actuel. La

famille n'existe pas. Ce qu'on appelle aujourd'hui de ce nom, c'est un groupe minuscule d'êtres humains autour de chacun . . . La profession, de ce point de vue, ne compte pas non plus. La corporation était un lien entre les morts, les vivants et les hommes non encore nés, dans le cadre d'un certain travail. Il n'y a rien aujourd'hui qui soit si peu que ce soit orienté vers une telle fonction . . . Enfin le village, la ville, la contrée, la province, la région, toutes les unités géographiques plus petits que la nation, ont presque cessé de compter . . . En somme, le bien le plus précieux de l'homme dans l'ordre temporel, c'est à dire la continuité dans le temps, par delà les limites de l'existence humaine, dans les deux sens, ce bien a été entièrement remis en dépôt à l'État. Et pourtant c'est précisément dans cette période où la nation subsiste seule que nous avons assisté à la décomposition instantanée, vertigineuse de la nation. . . (pp. 90-1).

1789 fut vraiment une rupture . . . Les seuls à cette époque qui furent patriotes au sens que le mot a pris plus tard, ce sont ceux qui sont apparus aux yeux des contemporains et de la postérité comme les archi-traitres, les gens comme Talleyrand, qui ont servi, non pas, comme on l'a dit, tous les régimes, mais la France derrière tous les régimes. Mais pour eux la France n'était ni la nation souveraine, ni le roi; c'était l'État français. La suite des événements leur a donné raison. Car, quand l'illusion de la souveraineté nationale apparût manifestement comme une illusion, elle ne put plus servir d'objet au patriotisme; d'autre part, la royauté était comme ces plantes coupées qu'on ne replante plus; le patriotisme devait changer de signification et s'orienter vers l'État. Mais dès lors il cessait d'être populaire. Car l'État n'était pas une création de 1789, il datait du début du XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle et avait part à la haine vouée par le peuple à la royauté . . . Le changement s'opéra complètement à la suite de la Commune et des débuts de la Troisième République. Le massacre de Mai 1871 à été un coup dont, moralement, les ouvriers français ne se sont peut-être pas relevés . . . En 1871, pour la première fois depuis la Révolution, si l'on excepte le court intermède de 1848, la France possédait une armée républicaine. Cette armée, composée de braves garçons des campagnes françaises, se mit à massacrer les ouvriers avec un débordement inouï de joie sadique. Il y avait de quoi produire un choc. La cause principale en était sans doute le besoin de compensation à la honte de la défaite, ce même besoin qui nous mena un peu plus tard à conquérir les malheureux Annamites (pp. 99-100).

### *On Religion and Patriotism*

La religion a été proclamée une affaire privée. Selon les habitudes d'esprit actuelles, cela ne veut pas dire qu'elle réside dans le secret de l'âme . . . Cela veut dire qu'elle est affaire de choix, d'opinion, de goût, presque de fantaisie . . . ou encore qu'elle est affaire de famille, d'éducation, d'entourage. Étant devenue une chose privée, elle perd le caractère obligatoire réservé aux choses publiques, et de suite n'a plus de titre incontesté à la fidélité . . . Ainsi il n'y a rien, hors l'État, où la fidélité puisse s'accrocher. C'est pourquoi jusqu'à 1940 elle ne lui avait pas été refusée. Car l'homme sent qu'une vie humaine sans fidélité est quelque chose de hideux. L'homme sent aussi qu'il est né pour le sacrifice; et il ne restait plus dans l'imagination publique d'autre forme de sacrifice que le sacrifice militaire, c'est à dire offert à l'État. Il s'agissait bien uniquement de l'État. L'illusion de la Nation, au sens où les hommes de 1789, de 1792, prenaient ce mot, qui faisait alors couler des larmes de joie, c'était là du passé complètement aboli . . . Ainsi on a vu cette chose étrange, un État, objet de haine, de répulsion, de dérision, de mépris et de crainte, qui, sous le nom de la patrie, a réclamé la

fidélité absolue, le don total, le sacrifice suprême, et les a obtenus, de 1914 à 1918, à un point qui a dépassé toute attente. Il se posait comme un absolu ici-bas, c'est-à-dire comme un objet d'idolâtrie; et il a été accepté et servi comme tel, honoré d'une quantité effroyable de sacrifices humains. Une idolâtrie sans amour, quoi de plus monstrueux et de plus triste?

Quand quelqu'un va dans le dévouement beaucoup plus loin que son cœur ne le pousse, il se produit inévitablement par la suite une réaction violente, une sorte de révolulsion dans les sentiments. Cela se voit souvent dans les familles, quand un malade a besoin de soins qui dépassent l'affection qu'il inspire. Il est l'objet d'une rancune, refoulée parce qu'inavouable, mais toujours présente comme un poison secret. La même chose s'est produite entre les Français et la France, après 1918. Ils lui avaient trop donné. Ils lui avaient donné d'avantage qu'ils n'avaient dans le cœur pour elle (pp. 112-14).

Les chrétiens aujourd'hui n'aiment pas poser la question des droits respectifs, sur leur cœur, de Dieu et de leur pays... La popularité de Jeanne d'Arc au cours du dernier quart de siècle n'était pas quelque chose d'entièrement sain; c'était une ressource commode pour oublier qu'il y a une différence entre la France et Dieu. Pourtant cette lâcheté intérieure devant le prestige de l'idée de patrie n'a pas rendu le patriotisme plus énergique. La statue de Jeanne d'Arc se trouvait placée de manière à attirer les regards, dans toutes les églises du pays, pendant ces jours affreux où les Français ont abandonné la France (p. 117).

Notre patriotisme vient tout droit des Romains. C'est pourquoi les petits Français sont encouragés à en chercher l'inspiration dans Corneille. C'est une vertu païenne, si les deux mots sont compatibles. Let mot de païen, quand il est appliqué à Rome, a vraiment à titre légitime la signification chargée d'horreur que lui donnaient les premiers polémistes chrétiens. C'était vraiment un peuple athée et idolâtre; non pas idolâtre de statues faites en pierre ou en bronze, mais idolâtre de lui-même. C'est cette idolâtrie de soi qu'il nous a léguée sous le nom de patriotisme... Dans une âme chrétienne, la présence de la vertu païenne du patriotisme est un dissolvant. Elle est passée de Rome entre nos mains sans avoir été baptisée. Chose étrange, les barbares, ou ceux qu'on nommait ainsi, ont été baptisés presque sans difficulté lors des invasions; mais l'héritage de Rome antique ne l'a jamais été, sans doute parce qu'il ne pouvait pas l'être, et cela bien que l'Empire Romain a fait du christianisme une religion d'État... La Renaissance a été une résurrection d'abord de l'esprit grec, puis de l'esprit romain. C'est dans cette seconde étape seulement qu'elle a agi comme un dissolvant du christianisme. C'est au cours de cette seconde étape qu'est née la forme moderne de la nationalité, la forme moderne du patriotisme. Corneille a eu raison de dédier son *Horace* à Richelieu, et de le faire en termes dont la bassesse est un pendant à l'orgueil presque délirant qui inspire la tragédie (pp. 142-5).

L'État est une chose froide qui ne peut pas être aimée; mais il tue et abolit tout ce qui pourrait l'être; ainsi on est forcé de l'aimer, parce qu'il n'y a que lui. Tel est le supplice moral de nos contemporains.

Sauf erreur, la notion d'État comme objet de fidélité est apparue, pour la première fois en France et en Europe, avec Richelieu. Avant lui on pouvait parler, sur un ton d'attachement religieux, du bien public, du pays, du roi, du seigneur. Lui, le premier, adopta le principe que quiconque exerce une fonction publique doit sa fidélité tout entière, dans l'exercice de cette fonction, non pas au public, non pas au roi, mais à l'État et à rien d'autre... Son dévouement à l'État a déraciné la France. Sa politique était de tuer systématiquement toute vie spontanée dans le pays, pour empêcher que quoi

que ce soit pût s'opposer à l'État . . . Le langage servile de Corneille montre que Richelieu voulait asservir les esprits eux-mêmes. Non pas à sa personne . . . mais à l'État représenté par lui. Sa conception de l'État était déjà totalitaire. . . . (pp. 102-4).

Il était de mode avant 1940 de parler de la 'France éternelle'. Ces mots sont une espèce de blasphème. On est obligé d'en dire autant de pages si touchantes écrites par de grands écrivains catholiques français sur la vocation de la France. Richelieu voyait bien plus juste quand il disait que le salut des États ne s'opère qu'ici-bas. La France est une chose temporelle, terrestre . . . L'idée d'une nation appelée par Dieu en tant que nation n'appartient qu'à l'ancienne loi (p. 116).

### *The Meaning of History*

Toutes les tentatives pour déceler dans la structure de l'univers les marques de la bienveillance du propriétaire sont sans aucune exception du même niveau que la phrase de Bernardin de Saint-Pierre sur les melons et les repas en famille . . . Les tentatives du même genre dans l'analyse de l'histoire peuvent être illustrées par une pensée ingénieuse exprimée par une revue catholique de New-York, lors du dernier anniversaire de la découverte de l'Amérique. Elle disait que Dieu avait envoyé Christophe Colomb en Amérique afin qu'il y eût quelques siècles plus tard un pays capable de vaincre Hitler. Cela est encore bien au-dessous de Bernardin de Saint-Pierre; cela est atroce. Dieu apparemment méprise lui aussi les races de couleur; l'extermination des populations d'Amérique au XVI<sup>e</sup> siècle lui paraissait peu de chose au prix du salut des Européens du XX<sup>e</sup> siècle; et il ne pouvait pas leur amener le salut par des moyens moins sanglants . . . On aurait tort de penser que c'est là un degré exceptionnel de bêtise. Toute interprétation providentielle de l'histoire est par nécessité située exactement à ce niveau. C'est le cas pour la conception historique de Bossuet. Elle est à la fois atroce et stupide. Il faut être bien sensible à la sonorité des mots pour regarder ce prélat courtisan comme un grand esprit (pp. 237-8).

La conception absurde de la Providence comme intervention personnelle et particulière de Dieu à des fins particulières est incompatible avec la vraie foi. . . . Les incroyants, n'étant arrêté par aucun respect, discernent facilement que cette Providence personnelle et particulière est ridicule (p. 239).

La Providence divine n'est pas un trouble, une anomalie dans l'ordre du monde. C'est l'ordre du monde lui-même. Ou plutôt c'est le principe ordonnateur de cet univers . . . C'est ainsi que l'a conçue toute l'antiquité pré-romaine. Toutes les parties de l'Ancien Testament où a pénétré l'inspiration universelle du monde antique nous en apportent la conception enveloppée d'une splendeur verbale incomparable. Mais nous sommes aveugles. Nous lisons sans comprendre (p. 241).



## MR. CARR'S FIRST VOLUME

MICHAEL OAKESHOTT

THIS opening volume<sup>1</sup> is the first of three which are designed to compose together a history of the Bolshevik Revolution, 1917-23. And these three volumes are themselves the first part of a project which is to carry the history of Russia down to 1928. We have, therefore, a work in progress, and criticism must await further instalments before the value of the whole enterprise can properly be determined. Moreover, the manner in which the first three volumes have been planned makes it all the more necessary to withhold judgment until the fellows of the first instalment have appeared. For the volumes are not consecutive parts of a chronological tale; each deals with an aspect of the history of the Bolshevik Revolution and covers, from its own point of view, the whole period. The second volume is to deal with economic policy, the third with foreign relations; the volume now published is concerned with the story of the CPSU(B), the early constitutional pronouncements of the revolutionary régime, and its policy in respect of the national units of the former Russian empire. Consequently, some of what the reader may find absent from the first volume may perhaps be supplied in those which follow. But, with only the first volume before us, there are certain observations which may profitably be made and which are not likely to be falsified by what is to come.

It may be remarked, first, that Mr Carr has a profound, perhaps unrivalled, knowledge of the Russian writings, particularly Bolshevik writings, which bear upon this theme. He handles his material with great mastery and no sign of impatience; he is never at a loss for an apposite quotation. Secondly, the volume is pre-eminently readable. Its structure is clear, its details lucidly exposed and at every point there is evidence of a strong intelligence at work. Mr Carr is aware of the difficulties of his project and he is disarmingly modest about his achievement. And thirdly, without being himself a Communist, he has so much sympathy for the whole enterprise he is recounting that he is able to enter into the intentions of his subjects with remarkable success. In this volume he is dealing, in the main, with institutions, with the Bolshevik party, with the various congresses which met to discuss policy in these years, with the abortive Constituent Assembly and with the first Constitution of the USSR. But individuals appear, and particularly with Lenin Mr Carr has been to exceptional trouble to understand and expose his ideas and

<sup>1</sup> E. H. CARR, *The Bolshevik Revolution, 1917-1923*. vol. I. Macmillan, 25s.

intentions. But there is nothing that can be called a portrait of Lenin, and in some respects the secret of his power is only imperfectly revealed. The two appendices, in which Mr Carr turns aside from the narrative to expound first Lenin's theory of the state and then the Bolshevik doctrine of self-determination, are masterpieces of understanding and lucid, economical exposition.

But to these observations must be added another, which because it concerns Mr Carr's very curious notions of how to write history, is of more general importance. It may be said at once that Mr Carr does not conceal these notions; he parades them briefly in his Preface, and they are implicit in the plan and the detail of the work. And apart from the value, in detail, of his account of the Bolshevik Revolution (which is certainly great), it is particularly interesting because it raises in an acute form some of the more teasing problems of historiography.

Everybody who has tried their hand at it, knows that there is nothing like writing a novel for revealing one's emotional limitations; inadequacies scarcely visible in ordinary speech and action are magnified and become unmistakable. Similarly, the attempt to write history shows up the crudities of one's thought; the unguarded phrase reveals and magnifies a hidden prejudice and at every turn we betray our nakedness. Both Mr Carr's powers and his weakness are fully revealed here.

Let us begin with something simple. Mr Carr (but not his publisher) disclaims the intention of writing a history of Soviet Russia during the period concerned. His work, he says, 'purports to contain not an exhaustive record of the events of the period to which it relates, but an analysis of those events which moulded the main lines of further development'. In saying this he excuses himself from providing 'a vivid picture of the revolution itself' (which can be found elsewhere), but in fact he is confessing to the unfortunate enterprise of writing history backwards. And the effect of this decision is manifest on almost every page: the lost causes, the abortive attempts, the projects which came to nothing, the men who were eliminated scarcely appear, or appear only to be brushed aside by the historian in a story which can get on without them. 'The victory gained by the Marxists over Narodism and the revolutionary actions of the working class, which proved that the Marxists were right . . .', says the official history of the CPSU(B);<sup>1</sup> and though Mr Carr often improves upon the details of the story, he does not improve upon the point of view; his history is the story of those who were 'proved right' by success. On many occasions the defeated are not only squeezed out of the story, they are excluded also from giving evidence in their

<sup>1</sup> *History of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (Bolsheviks)*. Short Course, p. 30.



own persons. Of course it is not true that none but Bolsheviks appear in these pages, but it is largely true that everything that does appear is subordinated to the party which is predestined to win.

Now, that some men are defeated and others victorious, that some policies and projects go down before others, is common occurrence, and any history which did not recognize it when it happened would be convicted of incoherence. But that lost causes are not part of history, that they should be seen only through the eyes of the victors, that defeat at the hands of events must entail defeat at the hands of the historian, and that what is victorious is predestined to victory and is insulated from what it defeats — these are strange propositions to come from an historian. A bias in favour of what is successful (or appears to the historian at the time of writing to have been successful) is far more corrupting than any merely partisan bias; and it is not to be excused here on the ground that after all this is the history of the intentions, the activities and the fortunes of a victorious party, because these intentions and activities were not cut off from the rest of the story and were not, taken by themselves, what prevailed. History as a success story is always abbreviated history. Of course, often enough, the history of England has been written on this model — kings and statesmen being accounted 'good' or 'bad' in relation to some preconceived 'logic' of occurrences or development of events which is used as a ready-made criterion of relevance: some 'contribute', others are non-contributors and are as if they had never been. But it is disheartening, just when we were beginning to get over this sort of thing, to find it reinstated in respect of a new tract of the history of mankind. It is, I think, Mr Carr's concern with what he calls an 'appreciation of the universal significance' of the events he is recounting which has led him astray. 'Universal significance' is difficult to observe at the longest range, and it is not surprising that the enterprise of detecting it at the range of a mere twenty-five years should have degenerated into a peculiarly simple exercise in whiggish history. If the significance Mr Carr looked for had been something more modest, something less than 'universal', his history would have been more genuine.

Besides the 'appreciation of universal significance', the other task imposed by Mr Carr upon himself as an historian is that of achieving 'an imaginative understanding of the outlook and purpose of his *dramatis personae*'. Here nobody will disagree. And every reader will remark upon the outstanding achievement of Mr Carr in this respect. But there is something else to be observed — not any simple excessiveness in his sympathy, not the mere fact of sympathy out-running itself, but the manner in which, keeping so close to his chosen task, his sympathy is replaced by total immersion. Explorers of the jungle of history, when they depart from that mean in which they

remain explorers, are apt to fly to one or other of two extremes: they may insist upon all modern conveniences, dress for dinner in the jungle and never achieve a moment's real sympathy with what they are exploring, or they may 'go native'. Mr Carr has achieved the remarkable feat of 'going native' without being a Communist. He has, of course, been pushed towards this extreme rather than the other, not only by his commendable determination not to fail in sympathy, but also by his general view of the history of modern Europe with which readers of his other works are well acquainted. These presuppositions occasionally obtrude themselves in his writing about the Bolshevik Revolution; here and there, usually on the last page of a chapter when he is summing up a situation, passages appear in which they are expounded. But they lurk always below the surface, controlling the direction of his attention and the form of his analysis.

Now, if this were merely a matter of what is called 'bias' in history, there would be nothing more to do than call attention to it and commend it for its insight or observe its shortcomings. And in so far as it is a matter of 'bias', it is certainly not mere passion or prejudice: Mr Carr has a considered view of the way things have been going for some centuries, and if he fits the Bolshevik Revolution into this view and interprets it in this manner, he is doing something that Maitland could scarcely approve of, but something common enough to be excusable — particularly when no attempt at concealment is made. But unfortunately it is not a mere matter of 'bias': it is something much more important; it is a matter of style and diction. It is scarcely too much to say that 'going native' in Mr Carr's degree makes an end of anything recognizable as history.

Let us suppose a novelist who is recounting the fortunes and relations of five or six characters, each of whom is known to the others by a pet name. These pet names spring up within the world of the characters; they are invented by the characters and they compose a nomenclature the significance of which is that it helps to disclose how A thinks of B or how C and D understand the character of E. These names belong to the language which is spoken *between* the characters. But the novelist himself is not a character in his book; he is the creator of his characters. And if at any point he is engaged in disclosing the character of E, not as understood by C or D but as seen by somebody on the periphery of the world to which the characters belong, or if he wishes to disclose what E is 'really like', it will naturally be out of place, misleading, incongruous to refer to E by his pet name. Now, some such situation as this arises in writing history. The historian is the maker of his events; they have a meaning for him which was not their meaning for those who participated in them, and he will not speak of them in the same way as they spoke of them. He is the creator of his characters; and to reveal only what

their contemporaries thought of them or what they thought of themselves (though this is of great importance) is to show an imperfect mastery over them. This, I assume, is what Mr Carr means when he speaks of the historian's task as the appreciation of the 'universal significance' of what he is writing about. And when the historian merely 'goes native' (resigns the task of creation and allows sympathy to become total immersion) he handicaps himself severely — unless by some miracle the characters of whom he writes had themselves an appreciation of the 'universal significance' of their own activities. I think it is Mr Carr's view that this was the happy position of the men he is writing about; but if it is, I think also that he should have elucidated the miracle at greater length.

For most of his readers, however, Mr Carr in this history is dealing with a set of people who speak an extraordinary private language. They have an idiom in which they make their thoughts known to one another. Of course this language represents, like any other language, an interpretation of the world. But the significant thing for the historian is that it is an interpretation of the world (whether or not 'true') confined to a small body of men, and that this language requires to be translated if what these men are saying is in any proper sense to be understood by anyone else. And it is on account, not of the greatness of Mr Carr's sympathy, but of its misdirection, that he entirely fails to attempt the task of translation. He has himself become so adept in the language, perhaps he has come to believe so implicitly in the interpretation of the world it represents, that he has forgotten altogether that it is the eccentricity of a few. A history of the Albigenes written in the idiom of Albigenian belief would ordinarily be supposed to have been written merely for the edification of the brethren; it could mean very little to anyone else. But Mr Carr writes the history of the Bolshevik Revolution in the language of Bolshevism and yet looks for his readers (one assumes) in the world at large. It is true that, in recent years, we have been bombarded to such an extent by this idiom of speech that many of its turns are familiar to us, but that it can be said to have any clear meaning for us is an exaggeration. The way it has been used, as a jargon in which the same few phrases are repeated interminably, has ensured that it never rises above a minimum standard of intelligibility. And, above all, one would have thought, the task it imposes upon the historian is that of translation. The sceptic might suspect that the failure to translate springs from a too small faith in the intelligibility of this language, but that I think is not the case here. Mr Carr does not translate either because he believes that this is the language which reveals 'universal significance' or because he has forgotten that translation is necessary — a piece of forgetfulness all the more remarkable because on occasion he is capable of remembering.

The world, for Mr Carr, enjoys the use of two languages; the language of 'the West' (usually designated by the emotive epithet 'bourgeois') and the language of Marxist theory. His history, it would appear, is written for the instruction of 'the West', but it is written almost throughout in the language of Marxism. There are scores of passages where the reader finds himself begging the author to translate; but in vain. To begin with, the categories in which individuals are placed, the epithets used to indicate character or calling, are Marxist. We were treated in an earlier work of Mr Carr's to the classification of Burckhardt as a 'bourgeois historian', and here the idiom is unrestrained. Struve is 'a Marxist intellectual'. Molotov is 'a young intellectual from Kazan' — but what is an 'intellectual'? 'Proletarians' and 'workers' abound in these pages; men are either 'revolutionaries' or 'reactionaries'. And when the reader is introduced to 'rich peasants' and 'poor peasants', though it does not tell him very much, it is with a sigh of relief that he welcomes something that he can begin to understand. When Mr Carr wishes to describe the three leaders of the national movement in the Ukraine, one is called 'a learned professor' and another a 'self-made man' who had practised journalism, and we begin to see through the haze the kind of men we are being called upon to take notice of; but the third is merely a 'revolutionary intellectual', a term which, if it has a meaning, needs elucidation. Governments are 'bourgeois' (Finland) or 'proletarian'; revolutions are 'bourgeois', 'bourgeois nationalist', 'democratic', or 'socialist'. Parties are 'right' or 'left'. And when these categories manifestly fail to give meaning to the situation, Mr Carr follows Lenin in finding 'quasi-"proletarians"' and '"bourgeois"' national governments' in the eastern borderlands of Russia. And yet in observing the difference between the 'federalism' of the USSR and what we ordinarily mean by federalism, by some oversight Mr Carr does not refer to our federalism as 'bourgeois federalism', and having freed himself for a moment from the incubus of the Marxist idiom, he gives a reasoned and intelligible account of the situation. In short, Mr Carr almost invariably writes his history in the obscure, private language of the participants in the events he is recounting: there is no difference between the language of his numerous quotations from Lenin and Stalin and the language he uses to comment on them. Of course there are great difficulties. The historian has no vocabulary of his own; he is obliged in any case to use the language of morals and politics. But he should be wary of its implications. If he fails to perceive the difficulty, or surrenders to it, the 'reformer' in his pages will be opposed by the 'reactionary', 'revolution' by 'counter-revolution', and men and projects will appear only as they were thought of by their partners or opponents. For Clarendon an incident in English history was a

'rebellion'; for Mr Carr, Kornilov is the leader of an 'insurrection'. But the art of writing history is precisely the art of overcoming this difficulty — the art of understanding men and events more profoundly than they were understood when they lived and happened. Mr Carr is guilty of *hubris* when, in his Preface, he makes light of the difficulty of writing contemporary or near-contemporary history; its almost insuperable difficulty lies in making the translation from the language of morals and politics to the language of history. And the failure is aggravated here when the vocabulary is that of an eccentric view of morals and politics.

One of the effects of Mr Carr's surrender to the language of his characters is that he gives the appearance of accepting some of their doctrines with an uncritical readiness. The whole treatment of the much-advertised 'union of theory and practice' leaves much to be desired in this respect. And at one point an incoherence is uncovered, but not recognized, because of Mr Carr's misdirected sympathy. In the Constitution of the RSFSR, it is observed, 'the freedom of the worker was asserted, not against the state, but through the action of the state', and the 'bourgeois' notion of the individual requiring protection against the power of government was superseded in the 'autocracy of the people'. But the theory did not work out in practice. Not only did the VTsIK (as Mr Carr remarks) pass a resolution giving citizens 'a right of appeal against any neglect or violation of their rights by officials', but also a thoroughly 'bourgeois' conflict of interest appeared between the 'proletariat' and the 'peasantry'. And again, Mr Carr asserts that 'the essence of the terror [September 1918] was its class character. It selected victims on the ground, not of specific offences, but of their membership of the possessing classes'. This, no doubt, was the theory, but the brief account of the terror given in these pages shows it to have been of a different character — the elimination of 'proletarians' and their leaders who opposed the Bolshevik party.

It is not, however, to be thought that Mr Carr is universally uncritical — he can be critical, in detail, to great effect, even in respect of his hero Lenin. Inaccuracy in simple fact rarely escapes him; and he is not willing to pass over the more glaring examples of disingenuousness in the arguments of the Bolsheviks. And on the occasions when he assumes the proper role of the historian, he has some acute observations to make. For example, he points out that the principal leaders of the revolution took no part in composing the Constitution of the RSFSR, and he makes their abstention intelligible — they were engaged on more important work, the consideration of the party programme. But a more generally critical attitude is conspicuously absent. In his unwillingness to 'measure' Lenin and his partners in revolution by standards borrowed from the politics of more normal



times or less disrupted societies, he comes to measure them by their own standards and endows them with a right to wreck their will in Russia whatever the consequences, approving their enterprise and applauding their 'logic'. It would have been better if he had not tried to 'measure' them at all.

Besides his prejudice in favour of success and his failure to attempt the task of translation inherent in the historian's enterprise, there is another respect in which Mr Carr's account of the Bolshevik Revolution falls short of genuine history. Indeed, he appears before us as a wizard rather than as an historian: with a wave of his wand he puts us to sleep and we are carried as if in a dream to an island in time, peopled by a race devoid of memory, a race (it appears) either without a past or with a past so obnoxious to it as to be regarded as non-contributory to its fortunes. And it is no part of Mr Carr's project to call its or our attention to what it has forgotten or rejected. Into a Russia, which has a geography (though we are provided with no map) but no history, there broke a collection of extraordinary professional adventurers, speaking a curious language and led by a man of iron determination and almost miraculous proficiency in the language, able to express himself in it with an unmatched fluency and confidence. These adventurers came with long-matured plans for the organization of this benighted people. They were not wholly at one about what they had to teach or what they had to establish, but subsequent events showed that one group was predestined to gain the upper hand and impose its ideas and policy. Consequently, we need pay little attention either to lost causes, to the context of confusion and contention from which this group emerged triumphant (it is represented as almost a sham fight), or to what they found on their appearance. We are present, it appears, not at a reformation or a revolution, but at the creation of a world *ex nihilo* by a demiurge who came from Switzerland. Consequently, the starting point of our investigation is the abstract 'idea' to be realized and the generation of this 'idea': we begin not with Russia, but with revolutionaries in conference. We are told that Lenin was 'a practical Russian revolutionary, whose revolutionary theory was framed in the light of Russian needs and Russian potentialities', and we are told something about the immediate situation when he appeared at the Finland Station in 1917, but virtually nothing is said about the Russia to be transformed. On any showing, even the most doctrinaire, this Russia could not be entirely excluded from the situation, and here and there it comes in for brief recognition, but proper consideration is given only to the revolution of 1905, which is treated as an incident in pre-messianic history. It is hinted that in the forgotten past Russia was ruled by an autocrat, that it enjoyed the advantages of a secret police, that

the 'proletariat' had no legal status, and that the revolutionary task of eliminating the old bureaucracy was difficult. But Russia before the Revolution is never allowed to enter in detail into the story of the Revolution: it was merely non-contributory. Perhaps it is too early to make this complaint, perhaps in subsequent volumes Mr Carr will provide what is omitted from this; nevertheless, it is an omission here which most readers will regret. The story, even as the story of a revolution, seems to begin in a curiously remote place.

In short, if we take the guidance given by this first volume, what Mr Carr is to provide us with is a more accurate version of the legend of Soviet history — the story of the generation of Soviet Russia as seen through the eyes of its founding fathers. In detail it differs from the official histories; in general the difference is small, except in respect of lucidity. This is something valuable; it is important for us to know how this set of people thought of themselves and what they believed themselves to be doing and to have done. But it is something to one side of what a history of Soviet Russia should be expected to supply. The nearest parallel to Mr Carr's achievement is to be found in some of the earlier writings on the history of the United States of America: his attitude towards the history of Soviet Russia is almost a replica of St Augustine's attitude towards the history of the Roman Empire.



## THE ORGIASTIC ELEMENT IN MODERN SOCIETY

W. STARK

THE first and last question of sociology — the question whether the sociality of man is inborn and instinctive, or culturally determined and fostered by education and experience — is as far today from a satisfactory and agreed solution as it has ever been. Yet even those who believe that man is social by his nature and that the individual fits into society as the cell fits into the body and the bee into the hive, will not be able to deny that, on the human plane, social life implies social discipline — a discipline that thwarts many of our most vital and violent desires. However great the willingness and spontaneity with which that discipline is accepted, it will unavoidably be experienced as repression, and all repression tends to create a state of tension which may well become unbearable if it is not from time to time relieved. Hence there arises the necessity for a recurrent suspension of social pressures, for an occasional orgy, and all historical societies have acknowledged that necessity and catered for it. Yet the ways in which they have done so are worth considering if only on account of their variety.

If, under exceptional circumstances, the growing tension between the anti-social urges of the individual and the normal routine of social life is not relieved in good time, one of two consequences will ensue: either there will develop a neurotic state, or there will be an outbreak of rebelliousness. Of the former possibility, Chekhov has given a good description in his tale *The Murder*. A certain Matvey Terehov speaks there about his experiences with a sectarian group whose members have driven the mortification of the flesh too far, until one day a prayer-meeting turns into a mad-house. 'We all behaved as though we were frantic,' he reports. 'I read while the old maids and other females sang, and then . . . suddenly a trembling would come over them as though they were in a fever; after that, one would begin screaming and then another — it was horrible! I, too, would shiver all over like a Jew in a frying-pan, I don't know myself why, and our legs began to prance about. It's a strange thing, indeed: you don't want to, but you prance about and waggle your arms; and after that, screaming and shrieking, we all danced and ran after one another . . . till we dropped.' It is clear that all dancing manias, old and new, possibly including the jitterbugging of recent times, have the same psychological background and origin.

The other alternative — the rebellious disruption of the routine of

everyday life — is seen most clearly in the prison revolts which occur now and then even in well-administered institutions. But such outbreaks are by no means restricted to the closed society which is bounded by the four grey walls. Every society is a kind of gaol when its members begin to groan under the yoke of duty and discipline. Perhaps the 'unofficial strikes' are the best example of an upsurge of rebelliousness in society at large which is caused by the undue prolongation of an unrelieved monotony and the frustrations arising from it. The most obvious fact about these industrial disorders is the paltry nature of their apparent cause. At Grimethorpe in 1947, 132 miners objected to a small increase in their daily task which their own representatives had freely accepted, and large numbers of workers left the pits; in 1948, the whole vast mechanism of the London docks was brought to a halt because eleven dockers had refused to unload a 'dirty' cargo of the kind they had handled many a time before; and in 1949 a similar thing happened for a still flimsier reason — because of a dispute between two Canadian seamen's unions which, as the Ministry of Labour rightly said, was 'no concern of the people of this country'. In all these cases the real root of the trouble was not the ostensible complaint of the men involved, but, in part at least, their deep dissatisfaction with life in general and their own life in particular, the gloom which had settled upon them because of the drabness and colourlessness of their existence. Sometimes such a situation may even give rise to open violence. Aldershot is not likely to forget July 4th, 1945, when several hundred Canadian soldiers ran amuck and, for two hours, smashed shop windows, overturned motor cars and wrecked an amusement arcade.

The danger of such untoward events is obviated where the social order provides, or at any rate allows, an occasional orgy. The simile of the safety valve is perhaps trite, but it describes the situation exactly. The tensions which arise in a society are like the internal pressures in a boiling kettle: in either case a destructive explosion will occur if there is no outlet for the steam, and a well-ordered society, like a well-made kettle, will have such an outlet and will take good care to keep it open, even though it will only be used from time to time.

## 2

Those primitive societies which, in spite of the greatest material difficulties, have made a success of their common life, have generally had annually recurring orgies of an open and straightforward kind, when the air is cleared in a violent but healthy thunderstorm. Naturally there is a great deal of variety from tribe to tribe; one feature is more fully developed here, another there;

but for our purpose a composite picture will suffice. If we try to build it up, we see that four features tend to recur and are obviously basic. There is, first of all, a temporary suspension of food restraints—and by food we mean, of course, in this connection, drink also. The reveller fills himself with dainties and fuddles himself with wine until he is sick; and then he begins afresh. Even the patriarchal Jew drank during the Purim feast until he could no longer distinguish between 'blessed be Mordecai' and 'cursed be Haman'. With this relaxation of food restraints usually goes a parallel relaxation of sex restraint. It is very common for men to dress as women and vice versa, and this transvestitism is often the occasion for, and the cloak of, more licentious behaviour. Lewd and lascivious dancing plays a large part in primitive orgies, and it leads deeper and deeper into revelry until complete abandonment is reached. A third characteristic trait is the temporary suspension, or rather inversion, of the established class order which we can observe quite clearly in the Roman Saturnalia. At that time the slave was allowed to tell his master exactly what he thought of him and given an opportunity to air all his grievances; there was open fraternization between high and low; and the slaves took their meals in the dining-room of the house and were waited on by their betters. The rights of property were set aside, and some destruction of property took place. Nor is political authority spared. The tribesmen revile their chiefs as the Roman slaves did their masters and children their parents, and their may even be a *princeps Saturnalicus* as a living mockery of the real king. Lastly, the normal ban on violence is sometimes to some degree lifted, though it is, of course, never completely removed. A general mêlée may take place in which blows are struck, black eyes inflicted, and blood drawn, but killing is out of the question and could only occur by accident and not by design. The orgiastic nature of the brawl itself is a good guarantee against murder: people are too drunk to know what they are doing, and at the climax of the orgiastic experience any purposive action is unimaginable.

The last point brings out the all-important fact that orgiastic events are, in the final analysis, socially controlled. They go far, very far: but there is a limit all the same. They occur only at certain periods, usually connected with the agricultural calendar; they last only a definite number of days, after which there is a general return to normality; and even the forms which the frenzy assumes while it is at its height are largely traditional. In a word, the primitive orgy is not like a conflagration which leaps from roof to roof and destroys whatever it touches; it is much more like a bonfire lighted in the market-place which will collapse when its initial fuel is consumed. Indeed, a really well-built society will turn these wild spells of law-

lessness to good account. In the Middle Ages, Shrove Tuesday was followed by Ash Wednesday, the day of revelry by the day of repentance, and it is unlikely that people ever listened more meekly and more receptively to a moralizing sermon than on the morning when they were under the influence of a hangover. W. I. Thomas is, therefore, right when he defines the orgiastic element in social life from this positive point of view. 'The disorder,' he says, 'is a social pattern substituted temporarily for the conventional one, and... the periodic release of tension may be regarded as a physiological [and psychological] relaxation preparatory to the resumption of the state of sustained tension.'<sup>1</sup>

## 3

In the capitalist world properly so called fully-fledged orgies of the kind of the Jewish Purim or the Roman Saturnalia are rare. There are only survivals in those marginal belts where the capitalist spirit has not fully penetrated and some of the old tradition has remained standing. Agriculture is such a sphere. Thomas Hughes, in *Tom Brown's Schooldays*, has given an amusing description of a village orgy in Berkshire. These 'veasts', he says, 'were not the common statute feasts, but much more ancient business. They are literally, so far as one can ascertain, feasts of the dedication, i.e. they were first established in the churchyard on the day on which the village church was opened for public worship, which was on the wake or festival of the patron Saint, and have been held on the same day in every year since that time.' 'Every household, however poor, managed to raise a "feast-cake" and a bottle of ginger or raisin wine, which stood on the cottage table ready for all comers' — the cake being 'very solid, and full of huge raisins'. However, the feast was not a meek affair for 'there was a good deal of drinking and low vice in the booths of an evening.' Even man's most cruel impulses could for once be partially satisfied in what Hughes calls 'the noble old game of back-sword'. In that game, 'the weapon is a good stout ash stick with a large basket handle, heavier and somewhat shorter than a common single-stick. The players are called "old gamesters", and their object is simply to break one another's heads: ... the moment that blood runs an inch anywhere above the eyebrow, the old gamester to whom it belongs is beaten, and has to stop.' In spite of these crudities and cruelties, Hughes understood well the ultimately constructive nature of the orgy he is describing. He emphasizes that 'feast-time was the day of reconciliation for the parish' when Job Higgins and Noah Freeman composed their quarrels; and he comes to the considered conclusion that 'on the whole,

<sup>1</sup> *Primitive Behaviour*, p. 264. Cf. Frazer's erroneous view, *Golden Bough*, VI, p. 225.

the effect [of the feast] was humanizing and Christian'. In parts of Austria, Bavaria and Czechoslovakia this tradition of the dedication feast (*Kirchweih*) has survived into the present. The orgy has become fixed there at some date between the autumn harvest and spring sowing, it brings heavy feasting and merry-making, and regularly ends in a brawl in which non-lethal weapons such as chair-legs and beer-mugs are freely used. The event is always an embarrassment to the authorities, especially the district judges, most of whom know, in spite of their urban background, that the concept of crime will not cover these rustic frolics. Police prosecutions, however, almost always end in a blind alley because the peasants steadfastly refuse to testify against each other. It is much to be desired that these goings-on should be properly investigated and described before it is too late; we need more particularly an inventory of their phases, especially of the very interesting opening phase when the atmosphere begins to 'thicken' and things begin to assume that character of unreality which alone makes it possible for the participants to break away from the established norm and to behave orgiastically.

It is amply clear that the jollifications of our Yule-tide are the faint survivals of older more colourful orgies. The Christmas pudding is the feast-cake of which Hughes is speaking, the turkey and the rum-butter play a similar part, and most people eat much more than they can reasonably hope to digest. Alcoholic drink is also in prominence, and if there is no abuse of it on Christmas Eve and Christmas Day, it comes more prominently into the picture on Hogmanay. The old custom that kissing is not prohibited under the mistletoe indicates that there is a sexual aspect in the feast, and here, too, there is a considerable intensification of revelry as the time moves on: New Year's Eve is spent in dancing, often costumed dancing, with a certain amount of transvestitism, and, on the Continent at any rate, the religious rejoicings are followed by rejoicings which are anything but religious, until a grand climax is reached in such bacchanalia as the Carnival of Cologne and of Cannes. The suspension of the class order is not only seen in the general good will which prevails around Christmas and the freer mixing of all strata in the revelries, but also, and more clearly, in the army and navy tradition according to which the officers serve the lower ranks on Christmas Day—a tradition which, down to this present century, had an exact parallel in British hotels and boarding-houses. There does not seem to be much violence, but there is some; the smashing of street-lamps affords one outlet for the aggressive and destructive urges when they are roused, and the stealing of policemen's helmets another. The latter, though certainly a harmless pastime, must surely be understood as a semi-symbolical action and is thus more deeply satisfying than is apparent at a first glance.



Compared to Christmas and Carnival, Bank Holidays and Boat Race Nights are only very minor affairs, and it would seem that modern society has no other regularly recurring orgiastic occasions. But an orgy may develop at any time if the conditions are favourable: the tinder is always there, all that is needed is a match. The outbreak of a war is apt to release the long-repressed desire for revelry. In 1939, it is true, little enough happened: but the declaration of war was all too long overdue on that occasion and surprised nobody when it came, nor had the holocaust of the first world disaster yet been sufficiently forgotten. But in 1914 the streets of the great capitals showed the very wildest scenes. Beer flowed like water: upper-class women allowed themselves to be kissed by lower-class men: there was boisterous inter-class fraternization: and the smashing-up of the enemies' legations and consulates provided a fitting climax. Trotsky, who lived in Vienna at the time, saw what was going on and understood what was going on. The enthusiasm of the masses seemed to him surprising. 'What was it,' he asked in his memoirs,<sup>1</sup> 'that drew to the square in front of the War Ministry the Viennese bootmakers' apprentice, Pospischil, half German, half Czech; or our green-grocer, Frau Maresch; or the cabman Frankl?' Was it any kind of normal and natural idea? 'No, the moving force was something different. The people whose lives, day in and day out, pass in a monotony of hopelessness are many; they are the mainstay of modern society. The alarm of mobilization breaks into their lives like a promise; the familiar and the long-hated is overthrown, and the new and unusual reigns in its place.' For once, the class order is inverted: 'War affects everybody, and those who are oppressed and deceived by life consequently feel that they are on an equal footing with the rich and powerful . . . Would it have been possible at any other time for porters, laundresses, shoe-makers, apprentices and youngsters from the suburbs to feel themselves masters of the situation in the Ring' — the most fashionable thoroughfare of that fashionable city? 'It may seem paradoxical,' Trotsky adds, and thereby indicates a sociological truth much more significant than he realizes, 'but in the moods of the Viennese crowd that was demonstrating the glory of the Habsburg arms I detected something familiar to me from the October days of 1905 in Saint Petersburg.' A revolution has this in common with a war that in its first phases it is clearly orgiastic.

If constant dissatisfaction with, and repressed rebellion against, the class order is one of the main causes of tension in modern society, it is not surprising that every parliamentary election should contain a strong orgiastic element because it provides an opportunity to humble some at any rate of those who control our lives. The well-known 'election swing' or 'see-saw' — the regularity with which

<sup>1</sup> *My Life*, p. 201.

the party in power is weakened and defeated — is alone sufficient to suggest that we see here no rational, but a sub-rational mechanism at work. But politics are orgiastic not only on election day: they are largely orgiastic all the time. They allow men to fight each other: men want to fight, and yet fighting is not generally allowed in well-settled societies. Here, then, is an outlet for a repressed desire, and this facet of it provides for many the real attraction of partisanship whether they admit it and know it, or not. Denis Brogan has drawn attention to this point in connection with his study of the American character. 'In the hard and often drab life of the slowly consolidating western society,' he says, 'politics, for the men at any rate, was a welcome diversion. Torchlight processions, debates that sometimes ended in fights, violent press campaigns that sometimes ended in duels — these were welcome in the days before organized sports had undertaken to provide vicarious excitement for millions.'<sup>1</sup> They are welcome even now, notwithstanding the fact that some of the colour has gone out of the game, and that a vast amusement industry has sprung up all around us which caters for the same need. The orgiastic nature of a Hitlerite rally in the early 'thirties was obvious: but something of it is present in every political assembly, however dull and however tame.

Assuming that this partial interpretation of the political struggle is correct, can we not go further and claim that there is an orgiastic element in the class war as well? Obviously there are many reasons which set class against class, and some of them are purely rational, for instance those of an economic nature. Nevertheless the class war, more particularly in its cruder forms, also subserves the irrational desire to fight which is otherwise so closely controlled and so anxiously anathematized. In other words, the lower classes not only struggle against the upper because they want to destroy their privileges, and the upper against the lower because they want to preserve them, but simply in order to 'let off steam' — because fighting and conquering is pleasurable in itself. One of our foremost humorists, who happens at the same time to be an expert economist, has brought this point out very amusingly in his *Scowle* papers: 'On a map showing the hinterlands of Blackpool and Llandudno,' he says,<sup>2</sup> 'the village of Scowle would stand splendidly isolated in the zone of penumbral uncertainty . . . The village was divided very evenly in its allegiance to the two holiday resorts, and for a month or more preceding the annual wakes there was bitter rivalry between the two camps' — a rivalry intended to give colour to existence and hence orgiastic in character. 'Scowleans were much of a muchness in matters of wherewithal, education and birth, so that this somewhat

<sup>1</sup> *The American Character*, p. 15.

<sup>2</sup> BERNARD HOLLOWOOD, *Scowle and Other Papers*.

artificial friction was the only really potent force making for social cleavage. As such it was welcomed as a substitute for class warfare in a community almost devoid of bourgeoisie.' Had there been a local bourgeoisie, the Scowleans would no doubt have diverted themselves by hating and fighting that. *Faute de mieux*, they had to hate and fight each other: but some such amusement there must be from time to time in a place such as Scowle, otherwise life becomes unbearably dull.

## 4

The assertion that there is an orgiastic element in politics and class warfare contains already — though only by implication — the most important statement that can be made about the general position of the orgiastic element in modern society. Politics and class warfare are not annually recurring, but omnipresent features of our life: though they have their ups and downs, their climacterics and their dead intervals, they release our tensions not in one great outburst such as the primitive orgy, but by many silent and commonplace discharges. Hence the transition from primitive to modern society has brought with it a *splintering* of the orgiastic element — a splintering which is itself twofold: there is on the one hand the temporal dispersal of it; and there is on the other hand the dissolution of the one-time concentrated socially sanctioned bout of lawlessness into many different minor acts which offer their cathartic satisfaction only by slow accumulation. This latter observation can best be established by a survey of the many orgiastic outlets offered to us by our modern society.

One of the most common orgiastic devices of today is the use of 'bad language'. As all sound-patterns are in themselves completely neutral, this language is 'bad' only because it is orgiastic, i.e. in contrast to the normal modes of expression and implying a protest against the routine of social discipline. The thing is not altogether unknown among primitive peoples; exceptionally difficult and monotonous actions may be relieved by indecent songs so that their depressing effect is to a certain extent offset. But the primitives have nothing like our ubiquitous habit of swearing. They do not need it; we do. Now, every time somebody swears, he enacts a miniature orgy. The starting-point is a state of mounting tension with a good deal of dissatisfaction, frustration and spleen: a little incident or accident releases the outburst: the outburst itself is an open defiance of the canons of decency and thus a condemnation of the principle of order: there may even be a hint of violence when the person concerned stamps his foot or thumps a table: and, most important of all, as soon as the word has been uttered, as soon as the gesture has been made, there is an instantaneous sense of relief and liberation

which, as we know, is the ultimate purpose and justification of all orgies. The formulae of swearing have probably never been properly investigated, but it seems certain that there has been a comparative decay of blaspheming since Victorian times. Not, of course, because people are more religious now, but, on the contrary, because they are less so: the social order is no longer identified with a divine order, and so expressions of ill-will against it naturally need not involve the Deity. Today most swearing is probably obscene, indicating that the rules of modesty are the most strictly enforced part of our social code, and the most bitterly resented aspect of it.

Closely akin to the oath is the jest or joke. Fashion, however, demands and deserves a nearer scrutiny. It is highly significant that fashion is an exclusively modern phenomenon: it arose at the time when the orgiastic element in social life was being splintered and, though it is very complex in its nature, it is, amongst other things, one of those splintered-off fragments. It is true that there is little that is orgiastic about a fashion that has become generally accepted: indeed, once that stage is reached, there is even a good deal of compulsion about it, and by that time it has moved very near to custom and convention. But every fashion must have a beginning, and at its inception it is undoubtedly orgiastic. Those who pioneer in this field break away from established usage because they find it boring and irksome: they protest against the tyranny of the norm as effectively as the citizen who votes against the government or the reveller who smashes a street-lamp. It must not be thought that fashion is no more than a modification of superficial forms: its shaft is aimed at the vitals of social discipline. 'Each new style of wear,' Sapir says,<sup>1</sup> and he is right, 'calling attention as it does to the form of the human body, seems to the critics to be an attack on modesty . . . The charge is well founded . . .' A visit to those French race courses where fashions in dress are usually launched, would certainly provide ample evidence for it. But fashion not only offers a momentary escape from the over-rigidity of the moral code in matters of sex: it also is a seeming leveller of class distinctions and thus provides an outlet for one of the most dangerous tensions characteristic of modern society. The shop-girl who dresses like a duchess has, *pro tanto*, abrogated the whole class order. Finally, fashion presents the forms within which certain fighting urges can be lived out: on the one hand the fighting of young females for the male, on the other the fighting of females of all ages for social position and prestige. Thus nearly all the essential features of an orgy are, in a somewhat subdued way, present in the phenomenon of fashion.

The change that has come over the character of art, consequent upon the transition from medieval to modern society, is similar to

<sup>1</sup> *Encyclopaedia of the Social Sciences*, VI, p. 143.

the change that has come over dress and the attitude to dress. In the Middle Ages all artistic effort was inspired by, and closely interwoven with, the society-building, moralizing and conservative forces; now it is largely orgiastic, a vehicle of protest against the repressions which social discipline implies, a dangerous play with those emotions which society would fain lull to sleep. Painters today do not paint saints in ample robes whose folds hide the very outline of the body: they glory in the painting of bare flesh, in the shameless display of nudity. In *What is Art*, Tolstoi contrasts 'religious art' and art 'aimed only at giving pleasure'. His terminology is not altogether happy, but the observation behind it is true. 'At the time of the Renaissance and after it,' the great Russian critic of society writes, 'the element of sexual desire began more and more to enter into art, and (with very few exceptions, and in novels and dramas almost without exception), it has now become an essential feature of every art-product of the rich classes . . . From Boccaccio to Marcel Prévost, all the novels, poems and verses invariably transmit the feeling of sexual love in its different forms. Adultery is not only the favourite, but almost the only theme of all novels. A performance is not a performance unless, under some pretence, women appear with naked busts and limbs. Songs and romances — all are expressions of lust, idealized in various degrees . . . The ballet in which half-naked women make voluptuous movements, twisting themselves into various sensual wreathings, is simply a lewd performance . . . Odious female nudity . . . fills all the exhibitions and galleries. And to this class belongs almost all the chamber and opera music of our times — beginning especially from Beethoven (Schumann, Berlioz, Liszt, Wagner), by its subject-matter devoted to the expression of feelings accessible only to people who have developed in themselves an unhealthy nervous irritation.'

It is clear that we cannot follow Tolstoi all the way in his criticism of contemporary art. Quite apart from the fact that the release of tensions is not unhealthy, it is impossible to class Beethoven's music as orgiastic. The Ninth Symphony which Tolstoi more particularly condemns expresses the same positive and indeed inspiring ideology as the poem by Schiller on which it is based — the ideology of a class which was just beginning to enter into its era of fulfilment. But as soon as we leave this highest stratum of artistic effort and descend to a more popular level, we see how clearly Tolstoi recognized 'what is art' today. The literature which provides reading matter for the masses is dominated by two fundamental themes which are presented in innumerable variations and yet never fail to appeal: crime detection and sentimental love romance. Detective fiction satisfies the craving for cruelty, sloppy fiction the craving for sex adventure. Beside them



stands, as a third important category, the type of book whose main theme is the humiliation of the upper classes. One favourite subject is the decay and discomfiture of respectability (*The Forsyte Saga*, *Die Buddenbrooks*, *Le Testament Donadieu*); another, the stupidity of the masters and the cleverness of their servants (Count Almaviva vs Figaro; Bertie Wooster vs Jeeves); and a third, the nobility of the outlaw (Robin Hood, Karl Mohr, Stenka Rasin and Nikola Suhaj). As can be seen, every element of orgy as described above is amply represented.

It would not be difficult to show that it is the orgiastic character and content of his works which is responsible for the fame which a writer may achieve. There is no Scotsman who does not know and love his Robert Burns. What, then, has Robert Burns done for the Scottish nation? He has afforded them very welcome and much needed relief from their sternness. He has asserted that Scotland is not only the country of Calvinism but also the 'land o' cakes' and of strong drink; he has, in *The Jolly Beggars* and *The Merry Muses*, dared to handle the tabooed subject of sexual enjoyment; and he has, finally, 'debunked' the tyrannical minister and elder in the hateful and ridiculous figure of 'Holy Wullie', while vindicating the freedom and equality of all men in his more solemn poems. Another convincing instance, though in a somewhat lighter vein, is the popularity of Gilbert and Sullivan's operas in England. What Gilbert did was to ridicule, one after the other, all the idols and demi-gods of the Victorian age. In *Trial by Jury* his butts were the law-lords and the legal profession in general; in *H.M.S. Pinafore* the navy; in *The Pirates of Penzance* the army and the police; in *Patience* upper class aestheticism; in *Iolanthe* the peers; in *The Mikado* and *The Gondoliers* the aristocracy and its ways. If these pieces charmed all and continue to charm, this is due not only to the immortal melodies of Sullivan, but also to the mordant witticisms of Gilbert.

So much about literature; but today it is not the printed word that appeals to the masses, it is rather the visual picture presented on celluloid — the cinema. That the cinema is orgiastic from beginning to end, in its thematic material, in its social function, and in its psychological effect, should be obvious to all cinema-goers, that is, to everybody. Why does the world of two-dimensional shadows attract us? Because, as Jung has expressed it, 'the cinema . . . like the detective story, makes it possible to experience without danger all the excitement, passion and deliriousness which must be repressed in a humanitarian ordering of life'. In this way, cinema-going helps to moralize human conduct, not indeed directly, by inculcating moral ideas, but indirectly, by dissipating anti-moral energies. The matter is of more than merely academical interest. If this interpretation of the cinema is correct, then the censoring of films must not be

driven too far, and the consistent moralization of the screen would do more harm than good.

Next to literature and the cinema, the press must also be mentioned in this connection. If the distribution of information is its first task, the affording of orgiastic relief is a near second. Many people read crime and law-court reports before they look at the political news. Nor is the text of a newspaper alone largely orgiastic: the advertisement columns contribute their share. Models of stockings and brassieres brighten a page as much as a snapshot of a bathing belle. It would be interesting to analyse our press in statistical terms and find out how much exactly of its total space is given to reporting in the strict sense of the word, and how much to orgiastic material. In the popular Sunday press at any rate the latter would certainly appear to occupy a preponderating position.

Although the daily paper and the weekly visit to the cinema supply between them much of the need that was supplied in earlier days by the annual orgy, they cannot supply it completely. The reason is that the satisfactions which they offer are vicarious satisfactions: the man who reads about a rough-house or sees it portrayed on the screen does not himself fight, he does it by proxy and can only enjoy his identification with the hero, not the fray itself. No doubt, it would be wrong to over-emphasize the passivity of a newspaper public and a cinema audience: apart from the fact that, in the pictures at any rate, there is often only a thin dividing line between active and passive assistance, imaginative integration into an imaginatively presented situation is a genuine activity. All the same, there is a need for an outlet which will admit of a higher degree of activity and participation than the press and the cinema can afford, and that is offered by our modern sports. During a game of football and a boxing match, the spectators, it is true, cannot directly join in the conflict, but on the other hand they need not sit so quietly and restrainedly in their armchairs as when they are reading their penny paper or seeing a 'Western'. A good deal of overt reaction is permitted: the shouting, yelling, stamping and rattle-swinging that is going on all the time is an essential and acknowledged part of the fun, and without it football and boxing matches would not be half so attractive to the masses as in fact they are. It is also significant that the identification of a sports-ground audience with a football team is much closer than the identification of a cinema audience with the performers on the screen. The 'supporter' is an organized follower or fan: he travels up and down the country with his club, he displays its colours, its failures affect him deeply and its triumphs are his own. Betting is another device which narrows the gap between he who actually fights, and he who fights vicariously: it gives the onlooker a stake in

the outcome of the contest and thereby effectively unites him with it.

A special feature which is apt to be overlooked consists in the fact that in modern sport the established class order is disregarded and indeed suspended. A sporting contest is essentially a fair fight in which the initial chances of success are equal for all. Here a man can find what he otherwise misses in our society, just as the Roman slave could find what he normally missed every year on December 17th. Many of the outstanding personalities of sport have risen to their pinnacle from very humble beginnings: sport is almost the only avenue of ascent open to the American negro. No wonder, then, that the lower classes are interested in the playing field, the race track, and the ring: they scent, as it were, the orgiastic element in sport, and not only the suspension of the ban on violence of which we have spoken before, but also the egalitarianism inherent in it which stands in such striking contrast to the social stratification of the everyday scene.

It is sport, then, which constitutes the most important of the fragments into which, in our society, the concentrated orgy of tribal times has been broken. And it is in sport, too, that we can best see the continuance of social control throughout the orgiastic event, the fact that social control is indeed modified and seriously relaxed but never totally abandoned. It is in order during a boxing match to split an adversary's lip, to break his nose and even to bust his eye: but a hit beneath the belt is strictly forbidden. There is one sport in which the does and don'ts are so anxiously observed that it has even become a symbol for restrained behaviour: cricket. If we analyse all the orgiastic outlets which are established in our world, we see that there is 'a limit' in every one of them. 'Bad' language, though certainly obscene, tends to keep to a few terms which are repeated over and over again and accepted as expletives while it rarely ventures out into more detailed obscenity. Fashion is often 'daring', but hardly ever indecent. Art displays the body and moves around the sexual act, but it respects the final taboos. In detective fiction, the detective catches the criminal in the end; in sentimental stories, the lovers ultimately become a contented couple. The same holds good of the cinema. Gilbert and Sullivan thought it wiser to drop *The Rival Curates* because they felt that to ridicule the clergy would be taking an unwarranted liberty. But the matter is nowhere more clearly and more charmingly demonstrated than in the last scene of *The Pirates of Penzance*. The police are humbled and defeated. Yet, when all seems lost, the Sergeant appeals to the pirates in the following words:

We charge you yield, in Queen Victoria's name,  
and the Pirate King at once replies:

We yield at once with humbled mien,  
Because, with all our faults, we love our Queen.

## 5

If we survey the whole field, we may be struck by the degree to which our social life is taken up by the desire to satisfy the orgiastic urge. Professor LaPiere is surely wrong when he says that 'there is today insufficient social provision for revelry'. Nor is it reasonable to complain, as he does, that 'most modern revelry is initiated by individuals . . . whose interest is not in the satisfaction of the reveller's needs but in the commercial profit to be derived from providing others with that satisfaction'. Commercialization is simply the specific form in which all needs are catered for under capitalistic conditions, and there is no reason to expect this one to be an exception. Indeed, the percentage of the national income which is spent annually in procuring cathartic satisfactions would give us the best index of the relative importance of the orgiastic element in modern society. We do not know the figure, but we know enough to be certain that it is a large one. And we also know enough to realize that it is not money thrown away but, in principle, money wisely invested. This is a point on which one can quote LaPiere with approval. 'That revelry may have regrettable by-products is not to be questioned,' he says. 'Nevertheless, revelry *per se* is not to be condemned, since it serves the function of discharging the psychological tensions of the individual and of returning him to his usual pattern of life, content for a while to follow its course. Perhaps it saves his sanity;' and 'perhaps it helps to save the social system which generates those tensions'.<sup>1</sup>

An essay on the role of the orgiastic element in modern society cannot be brought to an end without a glance at the special problems that arise in an authoritarian country. Both Nazi Germany and Soviet Russia have used their cinema for morale-building rather than for orgiastic purposes, and have thus closed one of the most important outlets provided in the western world. The party struggle is also absent, and no change of government ever discharges the tensions between the man in the street and his master at the central controls. What remains is obviously not enough to fulfil the functions of orgy in social life. There is a gap which must be closed, and it is being closed by the provision of a scapegoat — in Germany the Jew, in Russia the Kulak and the Plutocrat. These figures may be hated and sometimes even manhandled, and by hating and manhandling them the public dissipates as much anti-social energy as it does in democratic countries by seeing Hollywood-made pictures and by going to the polls. That it has been found necessary to pro-

<sup>1</sup> *Collective Behaviour*, p. 466.

vide this substitute satisfaction is in itself an impressive proof of the importance of orgiastic outlets.

One question remains to be asked. Does the splintering of the orgiastic element which, as we have seen, is the most characteristic feature of its modern form, indicate a comparative weakness or a comparative strength of our society, if we measure it against earlier societies with their concentrated orgiastic outbreaks and feasts? Most people and perhaps even most sociologists would unhesitatingly say that our arrangements are greatly preferable to those of earlier times. Can anything be more disgusting than the total abandonment of a savage tribe? Yet the matter is not quite so simple. There are several considerations which must give us pause. If the safety valve must now be worked all the year round instead of once every twelve months, this surely indicates that there are more tensions to be relieved today than before — in other words, that the individual is less adjusted to his social routine than in earlier times. On the other hand, the comparative mildness of our orgiastic outlets leaves us only half-relieved, half-satisfied, while the primitive emerges from his annual bout completely exhausted in body and mind and so tired that he is only too glad to return to his wonted rut. Furthermore, we are not quite certain that our enjoyments are really legitimate. No Dionysos presides over our bacchanalia. On the contrary, some religious sentiment frowns on our jollifications and would like to see them suppressed. If it is true, however, that they are a necessary ingredient in our social existence, our ideologies should recognize them and thus integrate them fully with our social order as they once were integrated.

Further, it must surely be deplored that orgies are now no longer community affairs. *Every* villager went to the 'veast' which took place during Tom Brown's schooldays, poor and rich, cottager and squire alike. All without exception allowed themselves, once a year, to be submerged in an atmosphere of common humanity. That is no longer so. Today the rich, the middle classes, and the poor keep as anxiously apart in their revelries as they do in their ordinary lives, and in this respect our society is even more class-ridden than darkest India. 'Class amusements,' says Thomas Hughes, 'be they for dukes or ploughboys, always become nuisances and curses to a country.' We have lost the art of happy abandonment which enabled our simpler forefathers once in a while to forget social distances and differences and to be for one day every year a single community.

It would appear, then, that the splintering of the orgiastic element is a sign of weakness in the social bond, not a sign of strength. And, when all is said and done, this ought not to surprise us. Our social system is not yet fully matured. The time which has elapsed since the Industrial Revolution is too short to allow for



the collective elaboration of a common pattern of existence which must needs be a slow and laborious process. Though one cannot be dogmatic on this point, one aspect of it is likely to be the ultimate concentration of the orgiastic element which is now dissipated and its re-appearance as a generally accepted and legitimately enjoyed link in the chain of our days.

## CORRESPONDENCE

### THE CIVIL SERVICE IN 1950

Sir,

*The Cambridge Journal* of October, 1950 contained an article on 'The Civil Service in 1950'. The author — L. Q. C. — described it as 'some rather random and haphazard thoughts about the Civil Service written down by one who saw much of it during the war, who liked a good deal — but by no means all — of what he saw, who still keeps in touch with many Civil Servants, and who feels that there are reasons for being somewhat apprehensive about the future of the Civil Service'.

This article, unlike much that is printed about the Civil Service, is written by someone who is anxious that the Service should retain its high quality and who understands many of the things which are essential if this is to come about. What he says is, therefore, bound to attract attention and deserves careful study. But it seems to me that in certain important respects L. Q. C. has either only stated a part of the facts or has drawn false conclusions from what he has said. The impression left by his article I therefore believe to be in some respects seriously misleading. I am grateful, therefore, for an opportunity to supplement what L. Q. C. has written and to present what I believe to be a more accurate picture.

I hope L. Q. C. will not regard as unfair a preliminary observation about his general attitude. He dislikes 'the unprecedented degree of regimentation' which took place during the war and the degree of Government control or interference that has persisted since 1945. Is it possible that his dislike of this policy — for which of course Civil Servants have no responsibility — has made him take a somewhat jaundiced view of Whitehall? Indeed at times I have wondered whether the initials L. Q. C. stood for the Last Quarter of the Century<sup>1</sup> — the nineteenth century of course: a grand period, but — well, we live and work in different times (which incidentally provides very obligingly the clue to my initials.)

#### 2

L. Q. C.'s main concern is, as I have said, whether the Civil Service will retain its high quality, and he supports this by the following statements:

- (a) Civil Servants ... 'are paid, comparatively speaking, much less well than before the war. That is to say, the standard of life of the average Civil Servant has declined substantially more than has the standard of life of the average citizen who is not a Civil Servant.'
- (b) 'They have distinctly less leisure than they used to have — hours are substantially longer, and leave is less.'
- (c) '... the pay and prospects are not now good enough to attract the first-class men who are wanted.'
- (d) '... there has been a significant reduction in the average quality, almost entirely due to the excessive promotion of men from other classes of the service during the great war-time expansion.'
- (e) Prospects for recruitment give rise to pessimism. In the 1949 Administrative Class examination the general average of the recruits who were taken must have been lower than has normally been the case since all the available vacancies were not filled. [A paraphrase.]

This represents the Civil Service as sinking into a slow decline. With respect, L. Q. C. has not paid due regard to the essential facts. What are they?

Omitting the Post Office and the Service Departments, the size of the Civil

<sup>1</sup> The initials, of course, are those of L. Quintus Cincinnatus. — Ed.

Service is today over double what it was in 1939. For rather more than half of the 11 years since 1939 (from the outbreak of war until the end of 1945) all normal recruitment to the Civil Service was suspended and the resumption of recruitment after the war coincided with the advent of the Labour Government, with a working majority for the first time. This meant that the Civil Service was called upon to deal with a very large legislative programme — a programme which added greatly to its duties in the years when demobilization and the post-war cleaning up processes were still in full spate. The Civil Service has thus been subject to a tremendous strain — a strain which has inevitably fallen most heavily on the Administrative Class and on its senior members. But so far from the Civil Service being in a slow decline, the steps taken since the war are now beginning to bear fruit, and the Service is far stronger today than it was at the end of the war.

It is true, as L. Q. C. states, that the needs for additional staff in the war years and in the immediate post-war years were met in part by a very considerable flow of promotion from the lower grades. And nobody would deny that although this showed that there were reserves of first-class men available in the lower grades, the Civil Service at the administrative levels was substantially 'diluted' by it. But what L. Q. C. does not observe is that whatever the degree of dilution by excessive promotion, nearly two-thirds of those affected by it are now over fifty years of age and are beginning to pass out of the Service in substantial numbers year by year. Thus the main part of this particular batch of staff will in less than a decade have passed out of the Service altogether.

Again the emphasis on the recruitment to the Administrative Class in one single year (1949) is misleading. The first step taken after the war in the matter of recruitment, which is not mentioned by L. Q. C., was to hold what was known as the Reconstruction Examinations, open to those who had been absent on some form of war service and unable to compete for the Civil Service in the war years. Nearly 500 candidates were recruited by this examination and their average quality was very high indeed. Many of them have already been promoted and they are beginning to take the strain off their senior colleagues.

Besides the Reconstruction Examinations proper, which recruited young men and young women to the Assistant Principal grade with a view to a full career in the Administrative Class, steps were taken to reinforce the higher grades, from Principal upwards, with maturer men of high calibre. In the first place, there were selected from among those who had come into the Civil Service during the war (many from the Universities) those who wished to make a permanent career in the Civil Service and who were of the quality required; some 180 appointments were made, mainly in the Principal grade though some were to still higher posts, not excluding the highest. Secondly, two open competitions by interview for the Principal grade were held (in 1946 and 1948) which yielded between them 120 Principals; and thirdly, a special competition by interview was held in 1947-48 to select suitable men from among the members of the India and Burma Civil Services who lost their posts through the transfer of power in India and Burma and who wished to obtain further Government employment. Forty-two appointments as Principal were made as a result of this competition. The Service has been greatly strengthened by these additions.

For several reasons the conditions affecting recruitment to the Administrative Class by the 'normal' competition in 1949 were exceptional. The evidence provided by post-war 'normal' recruitment is not yet sufficient to support any conclusions — optimistic or pessimistic — about the future. All one can safely say is that when a state of full employment exists, the Service must expect more competition from Business than at other periods. I recollect too that not many years ago it used to be said that from the national point of view the Civil Service was getting more than its fair share of the best products of the Universities.

## 3

What of pay and prospects? Are L. Q. C.'s words borne out by the facts? The pay of the highest posts throughout the Civil Service was reviewed two or three years ago by the Chorley Committee, consisting of Lord Chorley, Lord Layton, the late Sir Frederick Bain, Mr. George Gibson and Sir Hector Hetherington. Effect has now been given to their recommendations. They recommended that the two top grades in the Civil Service — Permanent Secretaries and Deputy Secretaries — should receive £4500 and £3250 as compared with the pre-war rates of £3000 and £2200, i.e. say a 50 per cent increase compared with pre-war.

It is true that there was a delay in giving effect to this recommendation. L. Q. C. suggests that this was due to some connection between the Treasury's planning functions and wages policy. The real reason for the delay was that the Chorley increases were due to take effect literally on the morrow of devaluation, when a general belt-tightening process followed. It was felt — and senior Civil Servants generally would not, I think, dissent from this view — that it would be wrong for Permanent Secretaries to receive an increase of £1000 a year on the very day when sacrifices generally were being called for. But that is past history and the increases are now mainly in force.

Another point not mentioned by L. Q. C. is that in 1949 the Government revised the Civil Service pension arrangements and that Civil Servants now have, for the first time, a real measure of cover for their widows and children.

Of course, a man with £4500 in 1951 is worse off than a man with £3000 in 1939. But this is all part of the general lowering of standards of the professional and middle classes.

## 4

The next statement of L. Q. C. which I shall deal with is the following:

Another change for the worse in the most senior reaches of the Civil Service has come about because of the tendency during the war to give preference for promotion to men of energy, forthrightness and determination . . . such men . . . like action for its own sake . . . senior Civil Servants should, for preference, be of a lazy rather than of an energetic disposition.

Now this criticism of senior Civil Servants strikes me as a very odd one. The view of the higher Civil Service, usually held by quite sensible people outside Whitehall, is that while Civil Servants may be bulging with brains and very good at constructing a logical argument, when they get down to doing business and getting on with the job they just fail to do as good a job as the average businessman who may have less good intellectual qualities. And I have always felt that, although the contrast was overstated, it was not wholly devoid of truth, and that some of us at any rate, were apt to be better at thinking things out than at bustling about and getting a lot of things done in a hurry.

Nor can one deal with this subject without recognizing a certain change in the functions of Government Departments. Most Departments are now closer to the affairs of the country at large than they used to be. They have far more contacts with people in all sorts of positions — from leaders of industry or the professions to individual citizens intent on their own affairs; all of whom rightly expect from the Civil Service clear and prompt decisions.

But the fact that Civil Servants have closer dealing with the outside world does not mean — as L. Q. C. suggests — that they have come to like action for its own sake, or that they desire to become busybodies or to extend the scope of their functions. It simply means that it is the duty of the Civil Service to produce people who have the necessary qualities to do the jobs which fall to them, and in so far as most Civil Service jobs now call for people who are capable of taking

decisions without delay, and acting in a businesslike way, that is the specification which necessarily rules the day.

One further point. The Permanent Secretary of a Government Department is today the managing director of quite a large organization; and he must be alert and active. And although there are still times when he will do his job best by following the advice of Lord Baldwin — which L. Q. C. quotes with approval — and by thinking of a hundred sound reasons for not doing something, this is only one of the many kinds of situations that he is called on to handle.

## 5

L. Q. C. criticises the system of Whitley Councils because of its 'time-consuming potentialities' and because it has resulted in a 'Frankenstein monster of agreements which hampers efficiency and makes it difficult, if not impossible, to deal with staff questions on their merits' (this is a free rendering of several impassioned passages). 'It is . . . merely a particular facet of a general disease which, in the view of many people, is killing the country, the disease of over-intricate organization.'

Whitleyism is certainly a time-consuming business and many of us sympathize with what L. Q. C. says as to the hampering effect of some negotiated agreements. But on both heads he appears to us to exaggerate rather picturesquely. Even in the case of the Redundancy Agreement, which he singles out as 'little short of catastrophic', the principle of discharge in reverse order of merit which he advocates was in fact adopted at all upper levels, the other principle of 'last in first out' being adopted only for staffs at lower levels. And the Agreement, though very far from perfect, has enabled very large discharges of war-time staff to be made in an intelligible and orderly fashion.

Two other points should also be mentioned.

In the first place L. Q. C. has made no mention of the informal side of Whitleyism. More and more Whitley negotiations are conducted between small informal groups to avoid the time-consuming sessions of large formal bodies. And probably the best work done by the Whitley Council organization is the practice whereby the Chairman of the Staff Side — the elected representative of the staff Associations — will come, perhaps with one of his colleagues, and have informal discussions with the Head of the Department and his staff manager about things which are beginning to cause friction or might cause loss of morale in the Department. These informal talks are of great value in preventing difficulties from arising and have made the staff as a whole feel that their point of view is something which is regarded as of importance and is understood.

The second point I would make is that L. Q. C. seems to ignore the difficulties inherent in any system of staff management in the Civil Service. He does not mention the amount of time which used to be spent by Ministers and high officials in the pre-Whitley Council days in receiving deputations from staff Associations; or the amount of administrative time consumed as a result of the lobbying of M.P.s, or the attempts to bring political pressure to bear in support of particular claims. It is not easy to secure a wholly satisfactory and economical system for handling staff claims in a State Service; and those who have had some experience of the Whitley Council system and what preceded it would take a good deal of convincing that the present system, with all its time-consuming potentialities, is not a good deal better than what went on before.

## 6

'I believe,' says L. Q. C., 'a departmentalist attitude to be growing; it is not discouraged as it ought to be, but on the contrary is being fostered by official policy which appears never to reflect that Government is inherently bad.' The existence of house journals in certain Departments is blamed.



'Everything should be done to make them (Civil Servants) think of themselves as servants of the Crown.'

Now frankly, this amazes me. I would have said that Departments today had far more appreciation of each other's points of view, and tried far harder than ever before to help each other, and to arrive at the conclusion which was best in the general interest, although inconvenient for some particular Department.

It is also remarkable that L. Q. C. should say nothing about the growth, during and since the war, of the inter-departmental committee system. Of this, as of Whitleyism, it can be said that it takes up a good deal of time; but the system does ensure that representatives of the Departments concerned in particular branches of policy, which do not fit within the departmental boundaries, meet together regularly and discuss matters of common interest and develop a common service point of view. On this point I just cannot reconcile what L. Q. C. says with my own experience and the experience of my colleagues in Whitehall.

Of course pride in one's job, like any other form of pride, has its dangers. And I suppose that the staff of a Department who believe in their job and care for it, are more likely to want to see that job developed, than the staff of a Department who thought that it made not the slightest difference if they did their work well or ill.

But surely, a proper pride in one's job and in the show one belongs to is one of the things which no good organization can do without. And it seems to me very far-fetched to speak disapprovingly of the introduction of house journals in certain Departments. Great Departments like the Post Office or Ministry of National Insurance, whose staffs are very large in the aggregate, but are spread over very many offices up and down the country, often in small numbers, should surely not be grudging this sort of measure — which no commercial firm in the country would despise — to enable them to realize that they are all members of the same family and team, notwithstanding that they meet so rarely. And surely, a proper pride in one's own job and calling is an essential first step to the wider loyalty of being a servant of the Crown.

If, however, what L. Q. C. wants is a reassurance that some senior Civil Servants sometimes in their bath say to themselves like a Roman Stoic, 'I am an evil: am I a necessary one?' he can have his reassurance.

# 7

L. Q. C.'s last point concerns Public Relations Officers. '... it is impossible to refrain from saying that here is a public servant whose significance has increased during the war and who could well be wholly abolished.'

The 'selection of specialists [i.e. usually men with journalistic training] for this job is wrong. It shows that trickery is in the air ...' 'These are the ephemeral, the truly journalistic successes, because successes of a day only, which these gentry try to win for their masters.'

In another passage, too long to quote, L. Q. C. asks what is it that has made it necessary, since the early 1930s, to introduce journalists or advertising experts into the staffs, and replies that the P.R.O. is not expected, in any but the most indirect fashion, to help in securing good Government. He is there in the hope that his particular skill and training will make the populace think themselves better governed than otherwise it is likely that they would.

To give the justification for the employment of P.R.O.s; to say how the work should be done; and to analyse the dangers in the system (obviously there are dangers), all this would merit an article on its own. Here I can only give a few reasons which lead me to think that this part of L. Q. C.'s article is off the target.

Briefly, then, and *staccato*, four short points:

One. With the growth of Government activities, the relations between the administration and the public are today on such a scale that they can no longer

be handled entirely, as in the past, through the Minister in Parliament. Some other channel of communication is needed for the purpose, and it is to meet this need that Departmental Information Officers and P.R.O.s have been appointed.

Two. As a matter of organization it is not practicable to let every administrative Civil Servant handle his own relations with the public. The mechanics of the business are too complicated, and take too long, to enable it to be handled competently by each administrative officer in such time as he could find for it among his other duties.

Three. One of the essential duties of the P.R.O. is to be able to explain things to the public in clear and simple language. That, as anyone who has tried to do it knows, is anything but a simple process: indeed, to do it well calls for a very high degree of skill and training.

Four. The reason why so many journalists were employed on this work is partly due to an accidental cause. The need for men to do this new type of duties developed rather quickly, and there were few if any people in the Civil Service with the obvious experience or aptitudes. Very naturally, therefore, recourse was had to specialists — journalists, publicists and so forth. But as time goes on more and more administrative Civil Servants will be trained for these posts and employed in them for a tour of duty.

I have, I hope, said enough to dispose of the view that the whole P.R.O. business is just a piece of trickery, concerned with the prostitution of truth to gain popular and ephemeral success. Indeed, I believe that if one goes deep enough, a study of the P.R.O.'s duties brings one very near the heart of some of the chief problems of democratic Government today.

May I conclude by saying that I hope that, in an attempt at compression, I have not been unfair to L. Q. C.'s arguments. As I said at the beginning, I have much sympathy with many of his points of view.

I am, yours etc.,

N. F. O.

## BOOK REVIEWS

FRED HOYLE: *The Nature of the Universe*. Blackwell, 5s. net.

Anyone who missed the original series of broadcast talks can have an entertaining evening with Mr Hoyle. I was only able to hear fragments of them, and I found the book even more satisfactory, if only because one can view it with more detachment. The author has two great gifts to assist him in the task of presenting a popular exposition of contemporary ideas concerning the cosmos: he writes clearly and simply, and he is not afraid of a dogmatic assertion. He paints a picture which he believes to be true, and if there are points which he cannot justify in ordinary language and by the use of analogy he does not try to persuade the reader that he can understand more than a non-mathematical presentation will allow. With all this he weaves his material into a fascinating puzzle which draws one on to the hypothetical solution.

The path which Mr Hoyle follows is not a new one. The English public has always endeavoured to keep up with its astronomers: Eddington and Jeans have but recently ceased to point the way, and in our father's day Sir Robert Ball held the field, no less a guide to the mysterious heavens than the two Herschels before him. The real difference is in facility for belief. It is only a century since the wonders of the universe were Saturn's rings and a new planet which almost anyone could see for himself who cared to take a little trouble. Since then we have been introduced to the conception of an expanding universe, but here we are brought to newer marvels, the creation of the planets from the explosion of a supernova, the continuous creation of matter, which not merely the citizen but the ordinary chemist or biologist must take upon trust or reject according to his taste. We are in such matters completely at the mercy of the scientific pundit who from time to time tells us what he honestly thinks we ought to believe and does his best to convey to our unpractised minds some reasons for our belief. Our only saving grace from sheer superstition must be a frank recognition that we accept statement X because it is made by A, and so far as we know B and C do not disagree with him; hardly one in a million is capable of comprehending the logical processes from which the statement is derived.

This is an inevitable consequence of the increasing complexity of science. If Locke and Bentley were confounded by Newton, we have little cause to be ashamed because we cannot fathom Einstein. The only rational excuse for believing what the scientific pundit tells him that the layman can have is the fact that it works; in all other respects he is simply acknowledging authority. His belief in what he read about atomic physics in the 'twenties and 'thirties is justified by the bomb, just as his passive acceptance of current medical and chemical knowledge is justified by the health of his children and the multitude of synthetic products that he uses. This is all the solid evidence that the human masses have for distinguishing between a pundit and a witch doctor — and the present vogue of astrology puts even this in doubt. Mr Hoyle writes for a public whose education has been at least literary, but even at this level some implications of his description are not unquestionable. Can the New Cosmology, by universal credence, let loose 'an idea as powerful as any in history'? No doubt if a sufficient number of reputable men repeat what Mr Hoyle has said for a sufficiently long time, the continuous creation of matter will become as commonplace an idea as the cohesion of the solar system through gravitational attraction. Whether this will ever penetrate into the group-mentality, whether new pronouncements from scientific authority can be more effective weapons against inhumanity and folly than, for example, the doctrine of evolution has been against extravagance of race, is a very different matter.

A. R. HALL

S. E. MORISON: History of United States Naval Operations in World War II, Vols. IV and V. *Oxford University Press*, 42s. each.

In these two volumes, the first entitled *Coral Sea, Midway and Submarine Actions, May 1942-August 1942*, the other *The Struggle for Guadalcanal, April 1942-February 1943*, Professor Morison continues his account of the war in the Pacific. His first volume on this subject, *The Rising Sun in the Pacific*, was a story of almost unrelieved disaster for the Allied cause; the present volumes tell how the Japanese advance was decisively checked. But they are not only important because they cover the period which saw the turning of the tide, in the Pacific as in the war as a whole. They deal with operations in which new naval tactics were being forged; they introduce us to material previously unknown in this country; they are welcome examples of the clear narration of complex and confused events.

The decisive character of the period covered was already obvious enough, but Professor Morison's detailed account impresses it upon us with renewed force. Later in the war, though many of the engagements with the Japanese were bloody and hard-fought, the Americans were always in superior force. In this period, and especially in May and June 1942, the months which saw the battles of the Coral Sea and Midway Island, they met the Japanese, hitherto invincible, in conditions of inferiority; and they not only checked them, but also registered a major strategic victory. The battle of the Coral Sea emerges, it is true, as a tactical victory for the Japanese; but it forced them to abandon the operation against Port Moresby; and if this result is perhaps a somewhat inadequate basis for claiming an American strategic victory, the battle of Midway followed soon enough. Midway, unlike Coral Sea, was a decisive battle. It was the end of the short-lived Japanese superiority at sea. The enemy not only lost four carriers, but saw destroyed, with the loss of his peace-trained carrier air groups, the possibility of future success in naval aviation. He could replace the ships, but he was never able to replace the air groups with crews, material and technique of the previous quality.

In consequence, in all the naval battles that were still to come, the Japanese were at a great disadvantage. For in the battles of Coral Sea and Midway, for the first time in history, the issue had been fought out by ships which did not make visual contact; and those engagements had ushered in the new naval tactics which followed from the use of ship-borne aircraft as long-range artillery, which were thereafter to dominate the Pacific war, if not the whole war at sea, and in which, while the Japanese could never recover, the Americans came to excel.

The struggle for Guadalcanal may seem at first sight to provide an exception to this pattern. In this confused fighting round the south-eastern islands of the Solomons group, which lasted for more than seven months, only two of the six major naval engagements were carrier-air battles on the model set at Coral Sea. The object of the fighting was a barren island, and the key to the situation was its air-field, for the possession of which there was endless skirmishing at sea and almost continuous ground fighting of unparalleled ferocity and misery. But the object and nature of this struggle were conditioned by the fact that it took place in what was still the transition stage. The Japanese, though defeated at Midway, could still contemplate, with the establishment of an air base at Guadalcanal, the domination of the Coral Sea and, possibly, of the eastern approaches to New Zealand and Australia: the Americans, though serious dangers were at an end, were still limited to a holding policy in the Pacific while the chief Allied effort was directed against Germany. The fluctuating, uneasy and largely tactical struggle for Guadalcanal was the logical outcome of this strategic situation, and it is with Professor Morison's next two volumes, *Breaking the Bismarck's Barrier* and *The Conquest of Micronesia* that the war in the Pacific will take on its true character.

In the present two volumes, Professor Morison's sketch of the strategic situation leaves nothing to be desired. His handling of the most complex and detailed tactical material, with which his history, being chiefly an operational account and not a strategical analysis, is largely concerned, could hardly be bettered. If anything, while it never falls short of complete clarity, it will prove to be too microscopic and painstaking for the convenience of the general reader. But British readers, and particularly students of naval affairs, should be the last to complain on this score, since so much of the detail was not available in this country until these volumes appeared.

F. H. HINSLEY

W. W. GREG (Ed.): Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus*, 1604-1616, Parallel Texts. *Oxford University Press*, 42s. net. The Tragical History of the Life and Death of Doctor Faustus by Christopher Marlowe, A Conjectural Restoration. *Oxford University Press*, 7s. 6d. net.

When Tucker Brooke edited in 1910 what is still the standard plain text of Marlowe, he based his text of *Doctor Faustus* on the earliest surviving edition, that of 1604 (A text), and placed in an appendix, in smaller type, those passages of the 1616 edition (B text) which were either absent from A or were widely divergent in the two editions. This procedure was based on the idea that A was the more authoritative, and that the scenes in B that were completely absent from A belonged to the 'adicyones in doctor fostes' for which Henslowe made the surprisingly high payment of £4 to William Birde and Samuel Rowley on November 22nd, 1602. Those scenes dealt in the main with a semi-serious subplot about the Saxon Bruno's defiance of the Pope, and with Faustus's vengeance on a certain Benvolio who mocked him. Between 1910 and this new edition there have been three landmarks in the study of the play. In 1921 Percy Simpson (*Essays and Studies*, vol. 7) showed that B was more authoritative than A at least for some of the comic scenes; in 1932 F. S. Boas produced an edition based mainly on B; and in 1946 Leo Kirschbaum (*The Library*, vol. 26) roundly asserted that 'the 1604 text is the bad quarto and the 1616 text the good quarto', and demonstrated more fully than had been done before that A had all the characteristics of a reported text, and that the original it reported was better reproduced in B. It is at this point that Greg's superb edition takes up the story, and it is fitting that the greatest living scholar in this field should have crowned his career by tackling the most difficult textual problem in the Elizabethan drama.

In the main Greg agrees with Kirschbaum, and in some directions his work must surely be definitive. He has marshalled all the evidence relevant to the establishment of a text, and has shown the composite nature of the 'copy' for B — partly manuscript, partly the A text. The detailed work on this must have been incredibly difficult and often tedious, but the editor can reflect with satisfaction that it need never be done again. There are, however, a number of problems where Greg does not himself claim that a solution can be arrived at by means of purely textual arguments, and I should like to record my doubts about his view on some of these.

It does not seem absolutely certain that the Bruno scenes belonged to the original text, as both Kirschbaum and Greg hold. All their arguments prove is that, if they did not, they must have been rather carefully dovetailed into the original structure, and that some of that structure must have been lost in the process. The older view according to which these scenes belonged to the 'adicyones' of 1602 has perhaps been too hastily discarded. A more serious question is whether Greg has not attributed too much of the play to another hand than Marlowe's. I think he is right in rejecting what he calls Kirschbaum's 'sceptical or agnostic' readiness to accept the Bruno business as possibly by Marlowe —



there, as he says, the comparison with what is certainly Marlowe is *in pari materia* — but the farcical elements are a different story. They are necessary to the play, as any performance shows, and I do not see why Marlowe should have deputed them to a collaborator, nor why the same collaborator should have subordinated himself to Marlowe's governing intentions in these scenes, and then been allowed to intrude the dreary irrelevances of the Bruno scenes.

The trouble is, I think, that though Greg has moved far from the over-romanticized and over-solemnized Marlowe of the later nineteenth century (witness his admirable essay, 'The Damnation of Faustus', in *Modern Language Review*, April 1946), his Marlowe is still a little over-simplified. The collaborator, for example, is responsible not only for the farcical scenes but also for the lines which end

Tush Christ did call the Theefe vpon the Crosse,  
Then rest thee Faustus quiet in conceit. (B1550-1)

'One of those touches of slightly sentimental piety', writes Greg — but the sentimentality is that of the character, not of the author. Faustus closes his mind against reality, with the help of a comforting, but misapplied, tag: a death-bed repentance is always *possible*, so why worry? The devil has made his disciple quote scripture to his own destruction. The speech is an admirable example of the sardonic, and ironic, realism which permeates the play, tragedy and farce alike. A comparable passage, also denied to Marlowe by Greg, is B673-5:

*Faust.* That sight will be as pleasant to me, as Paradise was to *Adam*  
the first day of his creation.

*Lucif.* Talke not of Paradice or Creation, but marke the shew.

And again B1857-9:

Torment sweet friend, that base and aged man,  
That durst dissuade me from thy *Lucifer*,  
With greatest torment that our hell affords.

If 'our hell' is not Marlowe, I do not know what is. The denial to Marlowe (as far as I know, for the first time) of the passage (ll.1812-62) in which these lines occur is the most surprising thing in the edition.

I should like to plead, then, for a reconsideration of the relation between the tragical and the farcical elements as a whole, especially with regard to their use of the *Faust Book*. I believe there are good grounds for seeing a single mind (and why not a single hand?) at work throughout.

The commentary is not designed to compete with that of Boas — indeed Greg records that it has grown beyond what he originally intended. But it contains a great deal of valuable interpretation: a particularly good example (where Boas has nothing) is the note on B516-8. Now and again there is a surprising decision. At A81, for instance, I do not know why Greg prefers his own 'signs', as an emendation of 'sceanes', to Logeman's 'schemes' which Boas records. The same corruption occurs twice in Donne, not only at *Sat.* I, 60 (mentioned by Boas, but the correct text is 'scheme' and not, as he prints, 'schemes') but also in the 1635 text of *Elegy XI*, 60. At B246, a more satisfactory interpretation of the intrusive '*Dragon*' than that which Greg takes over from Boas (priority really belongs to R. K. Root) was given by Kirschbaum in *Review of English Studies* for 1942, pp. 312-15. He treats '*Dragon*' as a warning to the property man to get the dragon ready to appear through the trap-door, at the point where the A and B texts have 'Enter a Devil', and compares the representation given on the 1616 title page. This would create no difficulty on Greg's own theory, since he holds that B is here dependent on the reported text A for the stage direction, and the impoverished company to which he attributes that text was unlikely, as he himself

says, to have a dragon. They probably did not have a trap-door either, hence they would have to substitute a normal entry for that 'from below'. Moreover—a confirmation which Kirschbaum does not note — Marlowe later in the play (B794) mounts Faustus (though not on the stage) on a dragon, where in the *Faust Book* the steed was Mephistophilis: the notion 'Mephistophilis as dragon' had stuck in his mind.

My comments have merely scratched the surface of this superb edition, which is probably the finest piece of scholarship ever devoted to an English dramatic text.

J. C. MAXWELL

GILBERT RYLE: *The Concept of Mind*. *Hutchinson's University Library*, 12s. 6d.

*The Concept of Mind* is a full-scale attack on 'the official philosophical theory of the mind' and a positive, though somewhat elusive, empiricist account of the data that the official theory sets out to explain. Professor Gilbert Ryle's attempt to 'rectify the logical geography of the knowledge that we already possess' is, in effect, an explanation (though that is not his word) of those terms which might, in the widest sense, be classified as 'mental'. The official theory is, for him, the view that mind and body are two heterogeneous stuffs, which yet interact. On this view, referred to as the 'dogma of the ghost in the machine', while a sharp distinction is drawn between covert thought and overt behaviour, meaning and utterance, private purposes and public performance, the relation between mind and body is conceived as paramechanical. Thought affects behaviour as a billiard cue moves a billiard ball, but with this difference: thought is a ghostly not a



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physical billiard cue. Against this view Professor Ryle argues that the difference between mind and body is a difference not between two terms of the same logical type, but between terms that stand for different ways of considering the same thing. To say that an activity is mental and not physical involves a type-fallacy no less than the statement 'She did not go home in a sedan-chair, since she went home in tears.'

To establish his case, Professor Ryle sets out to show, in detail, that no real distinctions correspond with the verbal distinctions that we draw between thought and speech, purpose and practice, that 'intelligent performance does not entail the double performance of considering and executing', that what I mean *is* what I say. 'I am bored' does not reveal a state of mind, which you may guess at but of which only I can be non-inferentially aware. My boredom can be as significantly asserted by you as by me, since to be bored is to say 'I am bored' or to behave in specifiable, observable ways. It has been said that there is no art to read the mind's construction in the face; but for Professor Ryle the mind's construction *is* the face. I have, on his view, no privileged access to a world from which others are excluded, as such terms as 'introspection', 'reflection' and 'selfconsciousness' have misled philosophers into positing. All that we may wish to say of mental states or mental activities may be restated, without loss of meaning, as assertions of what we can see, hear or otherwise sensibly perceive. 'Jones thinks before he speaks and Jones is generous' means that he speaks and behaves in certain empirically distinguishable ways. Although Professor Ryle is at pains to deny that he is 'reducing' mind to body, mental activity to physical activity, such a charge would be intelligible. At least there is no danger that the reader will accuse him of reducing body to mind.

In Chapter II, 'Knowing how and Knowing that', a development of his Presidential Address to the Aristotelian Society, 1945, Professor Ryle opens his main attack on the intellectualist position. He is concerned to reduce 'to absurdity the theory that for an operation to be intelligent it must be steered by a prior intellectual operation'. And he adds, 'What distinguishes sensible from silly operations is not their parentage but their procedure.' But from the first, he is at cross-purposes with his opponents. For while the intellectualist does indeed claim that intelligent (i.e. rational) conduct involves intellectual activity, distinguishable from the behaviour which it informs, that is not to argue that sensible conduct involves it while silly conduct does not. In establishing his second contention, Professor Ryle does not refute the intellectualist theory. For the distinction between rational and non-rational, with which the intellectualist is concerned, is not the same, or of the same type, as the distinction between sensible and silly. 'Silly', 'sensible', and the other sixteen pairs of intelligence-concepts listed on page 25, are sub-distinctions of 'rational' in the main antithesis 'rational: non-rational'. Only rational creatures can be sensible *or* silly; if sensible conduct involves thought, silly conduct involves it also. It may be that a knee-jerk ('non-rational behaviour') differs only in complexity from an attempt to solve a crossword puzzle ('rational conduct') but the argument that silly and sensible behaviour are of the same kind (and who would disagree?) does nothing to prove it. It seems that here Professor Ryle is committing a type-fallacy.

The intellectualist contention that rational conduct involves the consideration of reasons, which is distinguishable from the physical behaviour which it informs, is largely untouched by the main arguments of Chapter II. But many passages in the book have a direct bearing on it; for example the discussion of clowning (page 33), mimicry (page 262), talking sense and talking nonsense (page 296) and inference (especially pp. 299 and 306). The form of the argument in each case is essentially the same. What is said of mimicry is typical. As Professor Ryle admits, to be cross is different from successfully pretending to be cross; yet there is no *witnessable* difference between the two conditions. The difference is that

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pretending to be cross 'involves the thought of crossness' (i.e. of how a man would behave if he were cross), while being cross involves no such thought. This would appear to admit the intellectualist's claim. That, of course, is not Professor Ryle's intention and, when he comes to elucidate the meaning of 'with the thought of crossness', he says, 'Mimicking him is thinking how he behaves.' But this is no solution, for having explained the explicand, Professor Ryle is here using the explicand to explain the explanation. The reasoning is circular; we are back where we started. In effect, Professor Ryle's account gives not a wrong answer, but no answer at all to such questions as 'What is the difference between being cross and pretending to be cross, between doing something on purpose and doing something accidentally, between getting on a train that happens to go to London and getting on a train as a means to getting to London?'

In discussing self-knowledge, sensation and observation, Professor Ryle develops his thesis that we have no privileged access to what goes on 'inside ourselves', and that the 'infallibility', which some philosophers have attributed to the statements that a man makes about his own moods, sensations, motives and disposition, is spurious. My thoughts and purposes are, in theory, as accessible to you as to me. Were it not so, we should always be ignorant of the thoughts of others. Is this a very formidable objection? Many would find no absurdity in the admission that we can only speculate, with more or less confidence, about what others think and that we are often wrong. It is noticeable that, when we try to divine another's plan, we say 'What should I be doing in his place?' To suggest that we understand ourselves by watching other people seems to contradict not a philosopher's myth but common sense and common language. Yet many accepted beliefs are shown to be baseless and the most familiar theory of 'self-consciousness' is successfully demolished. For Professor Ryle establishes his case that we do not both see and observe ourselves seeing. We do not see robins and also witness ourselves seeing robins with a ghostly inner eye. But, to dispose of the privacy of experience, it is not enough to show that seeing and hearing are not objects of awareness. It must also be shown that they are not *forms* of awareness. His own attempt, therefore, to eliminate the privacy of experience is inconclusive and his final argument (page 208) appears to be tautologous.

Above all, is it not misleading to identify representative intellectualism with paramechanism? When the intellectualist maintains that we act from reasons, he intends to contradict, not to confirm, the paramechanical hypothesis that thought *causes* physical movements. Professor Ryle seems to assume that all explanation must be causal and physical and to take the agreement of the intellectualist for granted. For him, therefore, consistent thinking inevitably leads to behaviourism, the intellectualist being an inconsistent behaviourist who tries to find a place for ghostly as well as physical causes. But, uncorrupted by philosophers and left to their own devices, men look less for causes and more for reasons and purposes; in the past they personified the sun and the moon and looked for the purpose of the thunderbolt. Professor Ryle's weakness is not that he uses common language to talk philosophy but that he reads too many academic hypotheses into common language. Such a hypothesis, unexpressed and therefore less easily assailable, is the implicit assumption that the world consists only of things that can be seen and touched, so that there could not be minds as well as bodies, because we cannot see or touch minds.

One further criticism should be made. Professor Ryle's primary objection to intellectualism is that, being based on a type-fallacy, it is strictly nonsensical. But he also argues that the 'Two-World' view is false. He cannot have it both ways. If it is false it cannot be nonsensical. In his anxiety to expose the absurdity of intellectualism he sometimes slips into the equal absurdity of doctrinal empiricism and argues one metaphysical theory (materialism) against another. Empiric-



ism is a method not a doctrine; for a consistent empiricist, behaviourism as a doctrine must be as meaningless as intellectualism.

*The Concept of Mind* is polemical and the extent to which it provokes counter-polemics is a measure of its success. It is an important, provocative and original book which must force all who are concerned with the 'philosophy of mind' to reconsider their position. Professor Ryle has succeeded in shaking, if not undermining, the citadels of intellectualism. Only a very able or a very arrogant reader will be able to claim that he has been neither corrected nor instructed.

D. MITCHELL

#### BOOKS RECEIVED

*The inclusion of any book in this list does not preclude its review in a later issue.*

R. R. BETTS: *Central and South-East Europe, 1945-48. Royal Institute of International Affairs, 18s. net.*

BOOK COLLECTING: *Four Broadcast Talks by R. W. Chapman, John Hayward, John Carter and Michael Sadleir. Bowes & Bowes, 6s. net.*

J. A. CHAPMAN: *The End of Time. Blackwell, 3s. 6d. net.*

G. R. CRAGG: *From Puritanism to the Age of Reason. Cambridge University Press, 12s. 6d. net.*

A. P. D'ENTRÈVES: *Natural Law, an Introduction to Legal Philosophy. Hutchinson's University Library, 7s. 6d. net.*

JAMES D. HART: *The Popular Book, a History of America's Literary Taste. Oxford University Press, 30s. net.*

F. O. MATTHIESSEN (Ed.): *The Oxford Book of American Verse. Oxford University Press, 30s. net.*

S. F. NADEL: *The Foundations of Social Anthropology. Cohen & West, 25s. net.*

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- K. PRUSZYNSKI: *Adam Mickiewicz, the Life Story of the Greatest Polish Poet*. Fore Publications, 3s. 6d. net.
- GORDON RUPP: *Luther's Progress to the Diet of Worms, 1521*. S.C.M. Press, 9s. net.
- JEAN-PAUL SARTRE: *The Psychology of Imagination*. Rider & Co., 15s. net.
- SIR WALTER SCOTT LECTURES, 1940-48; Sir H. Grierson, E. Muir, G. M. Young and S. C. Roberts. Edinburgh University Press, 7s. 6d. net.

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